



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

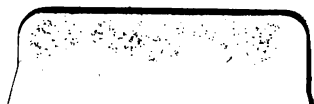
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07488018 2



NCW
Marryat



1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including "The Hon. Mr. Justice" and "The Hon. Mr. Justice".



COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 1874.

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL BY FLORENCE MARRYAT.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

LOVE'S CONFLICT	2 vols.
FOR EVER AND EVER	2 vols.
THE CONFESSIONS OF GERALD ESTCOURT	2 vols.
NELLY BROOKE	2 vols.
VÉRONIQUE	2 vols.
PETRONEL	2 vols.
HER LORD AND MASTER	2 vols.
THE PREY OF THE GODS	1 vol.
LIFE AND LETTERS OF CAPTAIN MARRYAT	1 vol.
MAD DUMARESQ	2 vols.
NO INTENTIONS	2 vols.
FIGHTING THE AIR	2 vols.
A STAR AND A HEART	1 vol.
THE POISON OF ASPES	1 vol.
A LUCKY DISAPPOINTMENT	1 vol.
MY OWN CHILD	2 vols.
HER FATHER'S NAME	2 vols.
A HARVEST OF WILD OATS	2 vols.
A LITTLE STEPSON	1 vol.
WRITTEN IN FIRE	2 vols.
HER WORLD AGAINST A LIE	2 vols.
A BROKEN BLOSSOM	2 vols.

THE
ROOT OF ALL EVIL.

BY

~~FLORENCE MARRYAT.~~

(MRS. FRANCIS LEAN.)

AUTHOR OF "LOVE'S CONFLICT," "A BROKEN BLOSSOM," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1880.

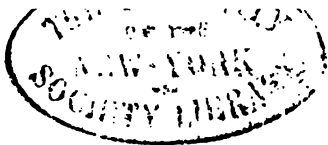
The Right of Translation is reserved.

111371B

CONTENTS

OF VOLUME I.

	Page
CHAPTER I. You must play your Cards very carefully . . .	7
— II. "No more dead than you are"	25
— III. "I hate the Sight of you"	40
— IV. "You are a rich Man, Mr. Vivian"	59
— V. "Keep her in the Dark"	76
— VI. "When shall you be coming back?"	94
— VII. "We shall never be more than Acquaintances" .	113
— VIII. "He must be a generous young Man" . . .	134
— IX. "He proposed this Evening"	151
— X. "Settlements"	169
— XI. "I wishes I was dead, I do"	187
— XII. "You may tell 'im that I'll do it"	205
— XIII. "What are you doing here?"	222
— XIV. "Marry Miss Farthingale! I couldn't do it!" .	242
— XV. "'Twas I give 'im hup"	259
— XVI. "Say an old Friend called to see her" . . .	279



THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL.

CHAPTER I.

YOU MUST PLAY YOUR CARDS VERY CAREFULLY.

IT was at an evening party at Mrs. Stingo's, not many years ago, that two old men and two old women were talking scandal across the whist-table that stood in an ante-chamber to the reception-room. Everybody accepted the invitations of Mrs. Stingo. She was not a lady, she was ignorant, uncultivated, and rude in her manners; but then her husband had amassed a fortune in trade, and whether honestly or dishonestly made no difference to Mrs. Stingo's acquaintance. She had a fine house and a fine carriage: wore handsome dresses and gave good suppers; and if one can get so much out of one's friends, what is the use of inquiring by what means their luxuries were gained?

Such at least was the opinion of the ladies who were playing *whist* in the ante-chamber. The older

and uglier of the two was Lady William Nettleship, the widow of the sixth son of the Duke of Mudford, whose grand family had never taken any notice of her existence.

She was very poor and very grasping, and would stoop to the lowest devices to save a penny. Yet there were people who, on account of her title, would fawn upon her and flatter her vanity, and lend her half-crowns which she always forgot to return; and amongst the most conspicuous of these was Mrs. Runnymede, the lady who sat opposite her. She was a stout overblown matron of fifty, whose husband, if alive, was never alluded to.

She had been cut by the larger portion of society, and was thankful, even at the expense of many half-crowns, to hang on to the skirts of any woman who bore the shadow of respectability about her. The partners with whom Lady William Nettleship and Mrs. Runnymede were playing, were Mr. Rufus Farthingale, an astute little lawyer, and Colonel Crossman, a male busybody who spent all his time going from one house to another, collecting bits of scandal to retail to the fashionable press.

"I cannot believe it," exclaimed Lady William sharply. "All Sir Peregrine's money to go to the missing grandson Vivian Chasemore! Are you quite *sure that it's true?*"



She was a skinny, dried-up-looking old lady, whose features twitched incessantly with incipient paralysis. She seemed to be particularly interested in the subject in hand, for as she leaned forward to question the lawyer, her head shook so as to set the gold butterflies in her cap into violent agitation.

"I am quite sure, my lady," replied Mr. Farthingale, with a smile of secret satisfaction. "Having enjoyed the confidence of the late Sir Peregrine for many years past, I knew of his decision long before it was made public. Besides it is no secret. The will was read out before the whole family."

"Well, *I* never heard of it before, and *we* are most intimate with Sir Arthur," returned Lady William.

"Perhaps Sir Arthur does not consider it part of his duty to make his grandfather's wishes public. But it is well known amongst his friends."

"It is the most astounding piece of news!" said Mrs. Runnymede. "Poor Sir Arthur not to have a halfpenny of the money, unless his cousin Vivian continues missing. What does he say to it, Mr. Farthingale?"

"He seems to bear the suspense very well, Mrs. Runnymede, and takes an active interest in the search that is being made for Mr. Vivian."

"Oh, because he is in hopes of getting proofs of his death, *of course!*"

"That I cannot tell you, madam; but we have the strongest reason to believe that he may still be alive, in which case he is sure to turn up before long."

"Well, everybody has been led to consider him dead for the last four years, and I think it will be the very height of selfishness and inconsideration in the young man if he is alive after all," remarked Lady William, in the same acid tone. "What made him run away from home in the first instance?"

"An unhappy disagreement, I understand, with his stepmother. His father, the late General Chasemore, chose, when Mr. Vivian was already twenty years of age, to marry again, and his choice unfortunately fell on a lady who was addicted to—that is, who had a weakness for——"

"*What?*" demanded Mrs. Runnymede, as she stared the little lawyer full in the face with her bold black eyes.

Mr. Farthingale seemed to be in a dilemma.

"It is difficult to speak of such things before ladies of your position," he murmured, after a pause; "but the fact is that the second Mrs. Chasemore had what the doctors term an inclination to the use of alcoholic stimulants, which caused much dissension and unhappiness in her family circle."

"*Oh, is that all!*" said Lady William, con-

temptuously. "That's common enough nowadays, I can tell you. I could point out half-a-dozen women in this room to-night who do the same things."

The subject did not seem to interest Mrs. Runnymede. She leaned over the table to Lady William and whispered:

"How beautiful Miss Nettleship is looking this evening!"

The remark was irrelevant, but it seemed to distract the mother's attention.

"Where is she? Ah, talking to Sir Arthur Chase-more! I thought as much. They are *such* friends. But I should like her to hear this story. Would you step across the room, colonel, and bring my daughter to me? Say I wish to speak to her for a moment."

The old colonel rose stiffly from his chair to do the lady's bidding, and in a few minutes returned with Miss Nettleship upon his arm.

"What is it you require of me, mamma?" she said indifferently.

Regina Nettleship was not a pretty woman, but she was very handsome. There was no rippling charm about her laughter: no quick, sweet lightning in the flash of her eye, that would have made a man turn back to look at her. She was tall, fair, and *perfectly self-possessed*, with good features and

a fine figure; but her eyes and her mouth were cold, and her whole manner reserved. She looked like a queen, but a queen that kept her subjects at a distance. She was almost shabbily attired in a black net dress that had turned brown with age, and a pair of gloves that had been both cleaned and mended. Yet no one could have mistaken her for other than she was; a gentlewoman with good blood in her.

"Mr. Farthingale is telling us such a wonderful story, Regina, and I want you to listen to it. It is all about Sir Arthur's cousin, that eccentric young man who disappeared from his home some years ago, and now it seems that Sir Peregrine has left all his fortune to him. Here, my dear, just sit down on the edge of my chair and hear what Mr. Farthingale has to say on the subject. It is really most interesting and romantic."

"Thank you, mamma, but I would rather stand!" replied Regina.

"I was just telling Lady William," said Mr. Farthingale, recommencing, in deference to the newcomer, "that, four years ago, owing to some unhappy dissensions at home, Mr. Vivian Chasemore left his father's house and never returned to it. At the time of General Chasemore's death, the young man *was advertised for*, but did not respond, so it was

concluded he was dead himself or had left the country. The grandfather, Sir Peregrine, never made any sign on these occasions; but two months ago, when he died and his will was opened, it was found that he had always looked upon Mr. Vivian as his favourite, and passing over his elder son's child, the present baronet, and all his other grandchildren, had left the whole of his fortune to Vivian Chasemore, in case he reappeared within three years' time, during which period an unremitting search is, by the provisions of the will, to be made for him. Of course it was a disappointment to Sir Arthur, who has only his very small patrimony and his profession on which to keep up the title. However, should his cousin not be found within the stipulated time, the fortune is to revert to him, so he has still a chance."

"Oh, Mr. Vivian will *not* be heard of, depend upon it!" exclaimed Lady William, confidently.

"I am not so sure of that, my lady. I think there is every likelihood of his returning as soon as the advertisements which we have sent out catch his eye."

"But if he is alive, why didn't he come forward at his own father's death? Didn't he inherit some money then, Mr. Farthingale?"

"*None at all*. General Chasemore died in debt;

and his widow, I am sorry to say, daily intrenches on the small provision made for her."

"Should Mr. Vivian return, he is hardly likely to offer his stepmamma a home, then?"

"Hardly indeed! It was her conduct that drove him away. It is a great pity he was brought up to no profession. It was rumoured after his disappearance that he had gone on the stage; but, if so, he has changed his name, and we have lost sight of him."

"Well, this is a pretty story altogether! What do you think of it, Regina?" said Lady William.

Regina had looked very thoughtful as she listened to the lawyer's recital; but the voice in which she had answered her mother's question was carelessness itself.

"Is it necessary that I should think anything about it at all, mamma? Sir Arthur's affairs cannot possibly concern us."

"They concern the whole of society, my dear. A young man who has disgraced himself, as Mr. Vivian Chasemore has, to be permitted to take the bread, as it were, out of his own cousin's mouth! I call it shameful!"

"It will not be quite so bad as that, my lady," interposed Mr. Farthingale. "Sir Arthur has his *profession*, you know, and a few hundreds beside.

Still, fifty thousand pounds is not a sum to be relinquished without a single regret."

"*Fifty thousand pounds!*" cried Mrs. Runnymede, with uplifted hands; "is it really so much as that? And all belonging perhaps to a low actor! How unequally the mercies of Heaven are distributed in this world! Fifty thousand pounds! Well, I never! And should Mr. Vivian Chasemore be alive, Mr. Farthingale, how soon shall you hear of it?"

"We expect to have news of him every day, madam. The bloodhounds of the law are after him in every direction. Sir Arthur is as anxious for intelligence as any of us. He is a fine character. We see a great deal of him. He constantly honours our humble dwelling."

Lady William regarded the little lawyer with her keen eyes suspiciously. He also had a daughter, whom some people thought good-looking, and who was reputed sole heiress to a considerable sum of money. Miss Regina's mother sniffed danger in the air.

"Oh, Sir Arthur is a great deal at your house, is he? I suppose Miss Selina is the attraction there—eh, Mr. Farthingale?"

"Oh, now, really, your ladyship must excuse me. I know nothing of young ladies' fancies, nor young gentlemen's *either*—I do not, upon my word! But

Sir Arthur has naturally a great deal of business to transact with me at present; and he and Selina appear to have a mutual inclination for music. Sir Arthur possesses a fine voice."

"Does he? I have never heard it. Runnymede" (Lady William had a most offensive habit of addressing those whom she considered her inferiors by their surnames), I shan't play any more to-night. I think it is time we paid a little attention to our hostess. How do we stand with regard to the pool? Oh, I see! I owe Colonel Crossman seven-and-sixpence. Just pay him, there's a good soul! for I've no change, and remind me of it to-morrow. Come, Regina!"

"Where are you going now, mamma?"

"Into the next room, my dear, to speak to Mrs. Stingo."

But on their way there Lady William drew her daughter aside into a sort of conservatory that stood upon the landing.

"Regina, you must play your cards very carefully with regard to Sir Arthur."

"I don't understand you, mamma. I have no cards to play."

"You understand perfectly. But you are as obstinate as your father was before you. Cannot *you see that* little lawyer's game? He wants to

catch the baronet for his vulgar daughter, and will do all he can to find Vivian Chasemore in consequence. That is why he goes spreading the story in every direction. It's to keep other people off. He knows that his money-bags will be some inducement to Sir Arthur, as things are at present; but should he come into his grandfather's fortune, Miss Selina may whistle for him!"

"And what is all this to me?"

"Really, Regina, you are the most provoking girl in existence! To hear you talk, one would imagine you had been born with a gold spoon in your mouth. But fifty thousand pounds, my dear! Only think of it! *Fifty thousand pounds!* For Heaven's sake, don't let it slip between your fingers!"

Lady William's face turned almost green with envy as she mouthed the amount of Sir Peregrine's fortune, and clutched at the trimming of her daughter's shabby dress with her claw-like hand as though to entreat her consideration.

"Go on, mamma," said Regina. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to keep good friends with Sir Arthur, without entangling yourself—he *may* have the money after all, you know—but you mustn't go too far, as you *may not* be able to draw back when

necessary. There is no saying what the next few days may bring forth. You heard Mr. Farthingale's opinion—that news may be received of Vivian Chasemore at any moment.”

“And then——”

“*And then*—upon my word, Regina, any one, to see you stare at me in that extraordinary manner, would say you had not the full use of your senses. Why, of course, in such an emergency, your instinct will teach you the best thing to do. But, meanwhile, you must not be more than friendly with Sir Arthur. You see how the land lies—should his cousin be found, the man has positively nothing but a few hundreds and his beggarly profession to depend upon. How can he bear the suspense? One day of it would kill me. But there is Mrs. Stingo beckoning to us—we must positively go. But remember, Regina, you must keep Sir Arthur in play.”

“One minute, mamma. This business is mine, and you must allow me to conduct it my own way. You need not be afraid. I know perfectly well what I am about, but I can't be dictated to, or have my actions commented upon.”

“Oh, very well! You must do as you choose. *But don't say afterwards that I haven't warned you!*”

exclaimed Lady William, as she hurried into the presence of her hostess.

Mrs. Stingo was surrounded by a bevy of such guests as she loved to gather about her—people who had much higher birth than herself, and much lighter purses; and who considered, therefore, her good dinners and suppers to be equivalents for the honour they did her in enrolling her name on their visiting list. There was Mrs. Macdougall of Macdougall — *the* Macdougall, as she was familiarly termed—an old Scotchwoman, who wore cairngorms as big as walnuts on her withered neck, and dined, for half the week, upon red herrings. *The* Macdougall laboured under the hallucination that Scotland was the greatest and most virtuous country in the world, and that she was the biggest person that had ever issued from it.

She had the smallest and most contemptible opinion of Lady William Nettleship, who was “only the widow of an English duke’s son,” whereas *the* Macdougall maintained that all *her* ancestors had been kings. Indeed, these two ladies’ claims to high birth and knowledge of each other’s impenitence had made them deadly enemies, and they could scarcely converse together with politeness even in public. Next to the Macdougall sat Miss Selina *Farthingale*, whose position being low enough

for patronage, made her rather a favourite with Lady William's rival. She was a dark woman, of five or six and twenty, with sharp pointed features and a cunning expression which was unpleasant to most people. She had little taste either, which was evinced by the profuse blond trimmings on her lavender silk dress, and the scarlet geraniums in her hair. Miss Selina had her admirers, however, and she fondly hoped that Sir Arthur Chasemore, who was leaning over the back of her chair, was one of them. But the alacrity with which the baronet left her side to rejoin Miss Nettleship, would have inspired some doubts in the mind of an un-biassed spectator.

"Dress cut a great deal too low," remarked the Macdougall in an unnatural whisper to Miss Selina Farthing, as Regina entered the room. "I ca' it indee-cent—positively indee-cent."

Miss Selina shrugged her mottled shoulders out of her lavender silk dress, in expression of her disgust at seeing Regina's.

"We mustn't be too hard," she whispered in the chieftainess's ear. "The stuff may have run short, you know."

"Weel, she had better cut a yaird off her train and soo it at the top, then," grumbled the elder lady, whilst the clear cairngorms looked like dull

fishes' eyes, viewed from the background of her parchment-coloured neck.

"And now I suppose you all want your supper!" cried Mrs. Stingo, in her coarse voice; "so the sooner you get down to it the better. Sir Arthur, give your arm to Mrs. Macdougall, and mind you help her to the best of all that's on the table. She never says a word about my suppers, but she pays me the compliment of eating them, as every one knows."

"I fancy the Scotch constitution is somewhat akin to that of the boa tribe, and can lay in a month's provisions at a sitting," remarked Lady William, almost before the Macdougall had disappeared.

"Now, Lady William, that's very spiteful of you! No one's to blame for their poverty, you know; that's what I say. Colonel Crossman, will you escort Mrs. Runnymede to the supper-room? There's a first-rate lot of Madeira at the head of the table, Mrs. Runnymede. I had it put out of the way of the young ones on purpose. Now, Lady William, here's Mr. Stingo waiting to hand you down—and Miss Selina will go with Mr. Pennycuick." And so Mrs. Stingo ran on until all her guests had disappeared, two and two, like Noah's animals going into the ark, *and taken possession of the supper-room.*

It was evident that, however dull the evening had been, they enjoyed themselves here. For a while nothing was to be heard but the clatter of knives and forks, and the ring of glasses and china, mixed with occasional remonstrances from Mrs. Runnymede and various other ladies, as the gentlemen insisted upon re-filling their glasses, which subsided into murmurs of pleasure, and a trickling sound, as the liquor found its way down their throats.

At last, though all the world knew this was what they had come for, Mrs. Stingo's visitors felt compelled to rise, and then Mrs. Runnymede asked for a cab to be called, and Lady William proposed they should all go home together.

"Don't let us accompany her to-night," whispered Regina to her mother, as Mrs. Runnymede came laughing and talking loudly into the hall, with her cloak half falling off her shoulders, and her black eyes looking bolder than before.

"What nonsense! What will you say next?" replied Lady William; "we *must* go together, we are to share the cab."

Regina shrunk backwards, as her mother passed with Mrs. Runnymede to the vehicle; and when she had followed them, she sat silent, with an averted face, until the cab reached their friend's house.

"Now, Runnymede! you must give me your

share of the expense," said Lady William, as she tried to extract the purse from that lady's hands. But Mrs. Runnymede was too sharp for her. She held her purse tightly, and made a calculation.

"Eighteenpence for three," she remarked, "so my share will be sixpence."

"No such thing! it's ninepence at the very least," replied Lady William. "It's a beautiful night, and Regina and I would have walked home if it hadn't been for you."

Mrs. Runnymede was still trying to solve this puzzle, when her friend snatched a shilling from her hand.

"This will do," she said; "you would have had to pay it if you had come by yourself, so it's exactly the same thing."

And before the other had time to expostulate, she found herself pushed out upon the pavement in front of her own door, whilst the cab rolled away with Lady William and her daughter.

They lived in second-rate lodgings in Knightsbridge, and when they arrived there, the inmates of the house had gone to rest. Regina crept as quickly as she could into the sitting-room, but her mother remained upon the door-step for at least ten minutes whilst she haggled with the cab-driver to accept the shilling she had *abstracted* from Mrs. Runnymede

as his entire fare, and he called her by every name in his vocabulary for being so stingy. At last the warfare terminated by Lady William flinging the money into the gutter, and slamming the door in the man's face. As she entered the sitting-room, she saw her daughter seated at the table with her head in her hands.

"Why, what's the matter with you now, Regina? I must say you are very selfish; you never will help me in these little difficulties, and these wretched cabmen are growing more extortionate every day. Are you ill?"

"No, mamma," said the girl, as she raised her heavy eyes, and cold, proud face to confront Lady William.

"You look as white as a sheet! What was Sir Arthur saying to you in the hall just before the cab came?"

"He asked leave to call here to-morrow."

"I hope he is not going to propose to you!" exclaimed her mother, in real alarm. "It will be most awkward and inopportune if he does. Now, mind, Regina, what I said to you. You must not commit yourself either way."

"I will remember it, mamma."

"*Really*, I wish I had known of this before; we

would have said we were going out of town for a week, and so put him off."

"For Selina Farthingale to make love to in our absence," rejoined Regina, with a sneer.

"Oh no, my dear! that would never do. Well, I suppose it is all for the best; but it's a case that requires the neatest handling, and if you make a mess of it, I'll never speak to you again."

CHAPTER II.

"NO MORE DEAD THAN YOU ARE."

WHEN Regina Nettleship came down to breakfast the next morning, she was still undecided as to what she should say in the event of Sir Arthur Chasemore proposing to her. She felt it was very likely he would do so. She had known him now for six months, during the whole of which time he had paid her marked attention. But at the beginning of their acquaintance he had been only plain Arthur Chasemore, with his profession as a barrister for a means of subsistence, and she had snubbed him in proportion. When he inherited the baronetcy, and, as she and her mother had fondly imagined, a *fortune on which* to keep up his title,

things looked different, and Miss Nettleship had encouraged the young man to an extent which would fully justify him in believing she would accept his offer of marriage. And now, notwithstanding Lady William's admonitions, she could not make up her mind what to do. Not that she loved Sir Arthur. She loved no one in this world, and nothing, unless it were the prospective chance of a life of ease and affluence. She was sick of poverty. She had been reared in an atmosphere of falsehood and fraud, and in her ideas the want of money was associated with every sort of evil. She saw the misery and dissension it had wrought with her mother and herself. It was the want of money that had soured Lady William's temper, and made her stoop to wrangle with her landladies and cabmen, and to cheat her friends. It was that which made her lie, and flatter, and grumble, until she had scarcely an amiable quality left in her disposition.

It was this same want of money that compelled them to associate with people like the Stingos, who were so much beneath them in position: to submit to the insolence of the Macdougals, and to be put on a par with Selina Farthingale and her father. Regina felt all this keenly. Notwithstanding their poverty, she never forgot that she was the *granddaughter of the Duke of Mudford*, and would have

been married before now, if she had not considered that her birth should sell for a higher price in the matrimonial market than had yet been offered for it. Yet, if Sir Arthur Chasemore was not a rich man, he had, at all events, the power to take her away from all the surroundings she so much disliked, and to give her a certain position as a baronet's wife. And then there was the chances of his discovering that his cousin was dead and of inheriting his grandfather's fortune. It was very puzzling to know what to do. As she entered the dingy little sitting-room, the windows of which looked as if they had not been cleaned for a year, and encountered her mother in a dirty cap and dressing-gown, trying to decipher the morning's news through her glasses, Regina shuddered. How she longed to get away from it all, by any means and with any one, so that she need never be subjected again to the discomfort she was enduring now!

Lady William glanced up scrutinisingly, as her daughter entered. She was not quite sure of the temper in which Regina had parted with her the night before.

"You don't look particularly tidy this morning," she said, as her eye fell on a crumpled muslin dress, with crumpled *frills* about the neck and sleeves.

"I dare say not! But if so, I am only in keeping with the house. There is nothing particularly tidy about it, or, I might say, mamma, about yourself," replied Regina, as she drew a dish of cold bacon towards her and tried to get up an appetite for it.

"Well! it is useless to wear out one's best things in the morning, when there is no one to see them. But you will change your dress, of course, before Sir Arthur arrives?"

"Yes; I suppose so."

"Have you decided in what words to reply to him in case he proposes to you?"

"No."

"Really, Regina, you seem to me to fly in the face of Providence. I pointed out to you last night how essential it is not to dismiss this young man all at once, and how delicate a task you have before you, and yet you tell me this morning that you have not even thought what to say to him on the subject. The end of it will be that you will refuse him before you know what you are doing."

"I don't think I shall!"

"You can never dream of *accepting* him, under the circumstances?" gasped Lady William, as her eyes and nose kept working violently with her *unusual emotion*.

"I don't think I shall," repeated Regina.

"But you ought to be *sure*: you ought to have no thought upon the matter," replied her mother. "A beggarly baronet, who has not enough money to keep up his position, whilst his cousin, Mr. Chase-more, may be in London to-morrow with fifty thousand pounds in his pocket! You have no more idea of your own value than that table has!"

"Look here, mamma, I don't want to quarrel about this; but I mean to do exactly as I choose. You are always holding up my value to me, but what has it brought as yet? At four-and-twenty I am still living in these wretched lodgings with you—still in the market, in fact—and I am sick of it all."

"That is right; abuse your mother, who has been doing her very best to get you married for the last six years. Is it my fault that you are still here? See how I scrimp and save, to take you out in society, where you may be seen and appreciated; and what has come of it?—nothing."

"A great deal too much, in my opinion," interrupted Regina. "The acquaintance of such women as Mrs. Runnymede and Miss Farthingale, and obligations which we have not the power of returning: I hate the whole system of our life. Can you wonder I *long to escape from it*?"

"This is gratitude! Pray go on; I shall not be at all surprised now to hear that you have decided on cutting society altogether, and subsisting henceforward on love in a cottage."

"I should be very much surprised to hear it myself. I am too much your daughter for that. I have been brought up to believe in but one evil—poverty; in but one good—wealth. I am not likely to forget the lesson now."

"Yet you propose to marry Sir Arthur Chase-more?"

"I never proposed it; I only said I should do as I thought fit. I might have married before this, mamma, if it had not been for you. But you have always considered your own good rather than mine in the matter of a settlement for life. I don't think that is fair. You have had your day, mine is to come. If I can enrich us both at the same time, well and good. If I can only relieve myself from the burthen of poverty, you must not blame me for doing it."

"Are you *in love* with this man?" demanded Lady William.

Miss Nettleship's face as she answered the question was a study.

"*In love!*" she repeated scornfully; "why, I don't *know* what the words mean. I have been reared

in poverty, and the frauds which to me seem inseparable from it; and I want to get into a purer atmosphere, where I shall not be compelled, for the sake of my dinner or the price of my cab, to call men and women my friends whom otherwise I should be ashamed to be associated with. That is what I think of when I speak of marriage. I have a tolerable face and figure, and I am the granddaughter of a duke. To some men these are advantages, and in exchange for them I demand liberty and a competence. I am for sale, in fact, for a certain price, and if I choose to lower it that is my business. Every merchant is allowed to cheapen his wares if he sees it is for his advantage to do so."

"Oh, indeed!" replied Lady William, pettishly; "that is all that you want, is it? Well, you should not find it difficult to suit yourself at that rate; and now, if you have finished your breakfast, I think you had better go and change your dress. You would be dear, even at a couple of hundreds a year, if you were caught looking such a figure of fun as you do now."

Regina took her mother's hint and left the room. She really wanted to be alone for a few hours, and think over what was best to be done. Yet, when it was *announced to her* that afternoon that Sir

Arthur Chasemore was waiting to see her in the drawing-room, she had come to no decision as to how their conversation would terminate. The young baronet had seized the earliest opportunity to pay his call, and as he attended Miss Nettleship's pleasure, he presented a very fair picture of the average good-looking Englishman. He was of middle height and well built, with brown hair and eyes, and a beard and moustache of which he was known to be inordinately vain. He was dressed in the fashion also, for, notwithstanding Mrs. Farthingale's desire to make him out a very poor man, Sir Arthur had an income sufficient to keep himself as a gentleman and his wife as a lady, when he got her.

Notwithstanding these advantages, however, there was a hard look about the young man's expression when he was annoyed, which betokened ill for those who should offend him seriously. His was not a disposition to exercise the divine quality of forgiveness easily, though few of his ordinary acquaintances thought so. It is as difficult for society to ascertain what a man *is*, as it is for the domestic circle to ignore what he is *not*. When a lover is courting, however, he appears in his happiest colours, and the smile with which Sir Arthur turned to greet Regina's entrance was sweetness itself. It even *melted her for the moment*, and made her think

how much pleasanter it was to encounter than her mother's snappish questions or bitter sarcasm.

After a short conversation on the events of the preceding evening, during which Miss Nettleship rallied her visitor on his devotion to Selina Farthingale, Sir Arthur summoned up all his courage and dashed af once to the point.

"Miss Nettleship—Regina! I am sure you must guess the motive which has brought me here to-day. You must have seen the feelings with which I have learned to regard you. You cannot have known me for so many months without reading something of the inmost workings of my heart."

"Really, Sir Arthur, I don't know what you are talking about!"

She said it so naturally, and with such a pretty air of mystification, that a bystander would have been trapped into believing she spoke the truth. And when she had finished the sentence she fixed her blue eyes inquiringly upon him, as though waiting for his explanation.

"Is it possible that you do not understand me—that you do not know that the hope of making you my wife has grown to be the greatest desire of my life?"

He had drawn nearer to her with the last words,

and tried to take her hand. But she shrunk away from him.

"Your wife! Oh, Sir Arthur! you cannot think of what you are saying."

"Cannot think of it! Why, I think of nothing else by night and by day, and I should have spoken to you long ago, had my time not been so much occupied by all this law business. Besides, I wanted to find out exactly how I stood financially, before I asked for this dear hand."

"Indeed, Sir Arthur, you do not know how little you are asking for. I am simply penniless. I have no marriage portion, and people cannot live upon nothing, you know."

This she said in order that he might be led into stating exactly what his own income amounted to.

"I would not dream of dragging you down into poverty for my sake. I love you too well for that. But I have sufficient for us both, Regina. Part of my late grandfather's property was entailed, and he was compelled to leave it to his sons or their heirs; by which I, being an only child, came into my father's portion of five thousand pounds. This, added, to the proceeds of my profession, which I hope may increase, will yield us five or six hundred a year, on which I can at least keep you in the same position *in which* you have been brought up. It is not wealth,

my dearest Regina, but it is not absolute beggary; and if you love me as I love you, I am sure we shall be very happy together. What do you say to the prospect?"

"Sir Arthur! you have taken me altogether by surprise. Whatever I may——"

"Oh, pray go on!"

"Whatever, I was going to say, I may have foolishly thought about you, I never believed you to be a marrying man; and you have set my brain in a perfect whirl. I cannot give you an answer without a little reflection."

"I suppose it is hardly to be expected," he said, in a disappointed tone, "though I made sure you must have seen what was coming. But you can at least tell me if you love me, Regina."

"That would be telling you everything," she answered. "That part of it requires more consideration than all the rest. Suppose we should make a mistake?"

"Don't think of it. Surely we are old enough to know our own minds? I am, at all events, for I was thirty last birthday, and no amount of consideration could alter my feelings with regard to you."

"It is such an important step to take," sighed Regina, as she played with the frills on her dress, and could *not* devise any means by which to put off

answering the fatal question. Could she be contented on five or six hundred a year? she thought to herself. Did it mean maids of all work, dirty lodgings, and squalling children? She had not had much experience in trying how far money would go, but she was very much afraid it *did* mean all that, in the future, if not now. And she shrank from the prospect. She could not sell herself so cheap. Sir Arthur attributed her silence to maidenly modesty, and tried to set her at ease again.

"I have set my prospects before you in their worst light," he said presently. "There is another side to the question, though, as yet, an uncertain one. Have you ever heard my cousin Vivian Chase more mentioned?"

"Mr. Farthingale told us his story last evening."

"Ah! Farthingale is very sanguine about finding the poor boy again, but I fear he will be disappointed."

"Are you? *Why?*"

Regina could hardly help the suddenly awakened interest becoming evident in her voice, as she uttered the words:

"Because—but this is a secret, remember, and I would tell it to no one but yourself. I have received private intelligence this morning which leads me to believe too certainly in his death. Perhaps

you do not know the difference this would make to me—may I say to *us*? Sir Peregrine left the bulk of his fortune, fifty thousand pounds, to my cousin Vivian. It ought to have gone with the title, you know; but he had the right of its disposal, and so I cannot complain. But if we receive the news of Vivian's death, or he still continues missing after three years, the money reverts to me. Of course, if the letter I have received can be verified, I shall come into it at once. But though it will procure a worthier case in which to shrine my jewel, I trust that no fortune could have the power to make any difference in your feelings towards me, Regina."

"Oh no! of course not."

Fifty thousand pounds within his very grasp! It was not likely the letter had been written only to deceive him. How she wished he would confide to her from whom it had come. But she could not let him go under this uncertainty. At all hazards, she must chain him to her side.

"You—you must be very anxious," she faltered; "but I am afraid the sad news will prove to be true. I thought it so strange, from the first, that if Mr. Vivian Chasemore were alive he should not have communicated with any of his friends for so long."

"So everybody says, but it did not do for me to be too sanguine. For the last two months the lawyers

have been writing and advertising in every direction without success. When I received the letter this morning, the description in which tallies in every respect with that of my poor cousin, I sent it at once to Farthingale, with orders to inquire into the matter. It will be a great blow to the little man's vanity to find he is wrong after all. He has been so certain that Vivian would turn up again."

"Yes; he said as much last evening. But no friend of yours, Sir Arthur, could wish the rumour of your cousin's death to prove untrue."

"I care nothing for what my friends wish; I only want to know what *you* will say upon the subject. Tell me, Regina, that whatever happens to me, I shall still have the comfort of your affection to fall back upon."

He came round to the back of her chair, and leant over her. He would not take an undecided answer for the second time. Miss Nettleship felt she would have to say "*Yes*," or "*No*," now.

"Oh! Sir Arthur! cannot you guess?" she murmured.

"I dare not. Too great a stake depends upon the issue. My ardent wishes might lead me wrong. You must seal my fate with your own lips."

"Will you not give me till to-morrow?"

"*Not to say you love me. Your heart must tell*

you so much. Give me the assurance that I am not indifferent to you, and I will promise to wait patiently for that which must follow it."

"Indeed, you are not indifferent to me then. Were it so, I could have answered your question at once. But when a woman's heart is concerned, you do not know the difficulty she finds in telling the truth."

"Say no more, dearest. I understand it all. You have made me the happiest of men."

At this juncture, the lodging-house servant abruptly opened the door to announce Mr. Farthingale, and Sir Arthur Chasemore had only just time to put a few feet of distance between himself and Miss Nettleship, when the little man came flying into the room.

"Eureka! Sir Arthur! I was told I should find you here. We have succeeded at last!" he exclaimed, as he flourished his hat and umbrella over his head.

"I was afraid you would find it to be true, Mr. Farthingale; but the news, though expected, is very shocking. When did the poor fellow die?" asked the baronet, in a tone of proper sympathy.

"Die! My dear Sir Arthur, he is no more dead than you are! I've just been talking to him; that is to say, if you *mean your cousin Vivian*."

"What about the letter, then?"

"Oh, that letter you sent me this morning? I've had no time to see after it, and it's lucky I didn't waste any on it. I found news waiting me from another quarter when I returned home last night, and I verified it the first thing to-day. Your cousin, Mr. Vivian Chasemore, is as hearty as you are, Sir Arthur, and at my house at the present moment. Won't you come round and see him?"

CHAPTER III.

"I HATE THE SIGHT OF YOU."

IN one of the smaller streets running at the back of Drury Lane stood the shop of old Mrs. Bell, the greengrocer, and everybody in those parts affirmed that it was "a perfect picture." The front of it was open, with a shelving board to display the fruit and vegetables; and when the carrots and turnips and fresh, crisp salads, and the onions and radishes and sea-kale were piled above each other on one side, and the apples and oranges, and bunches of grapes and baskets of filberts, were artistically grouped upon the other, to say nothing of *the strawberries* and raspberries, and melons and

figs that came and went in their season, you could not have found a more tempting little shop in the whole of Drury Lane.

Mrs. Bell, too, added to the picture, for she was a good old-fashioned country woman, who looked, in her spotless cap and apron, and her neat print dress, as if she ought to have been standing in a dairy in Devonshire, instead of a greengrocer's shop in a back slum of London. But, when young, she had followed the fortunes of a market-gardener, and been a faithful wife and friend to him until he died, with never more than a passing regret for the lanes and fields she had left behind her. She had lost her husband now for many years past, and her only son, and her daughter-in-law; and would have carried on the greengrocery trade all by herself, except for her granddaughter, Mary Bell, or Bonnie Bell, as she was familiarly called by the neighbours, on account of her pretty face.

Old Mrs. Bell was wont to shake her head ominously whenever that pretty face was alluded to. It had not been inherited from her side of the family, and so she was instinctively opposed to it, and inclined to believe that it would come to no good. For Bonnie Bell's mother had been a little ballet girl from *off the stage* of Drury Lane Theatre,

as good and innocent a woman as ever worked hard to prevent herself being a burthen on her friends, but still a great disappointment to Mrs. Bell, who had hoped to see her Joe bring home an honest housemaid or dairy-maid as his wife. Joe had possessed small eyes, a wide mouth, and flapping ears, being the "moral," as his mother affectionately said, "of his own dear father;" consequently, when little Bonnie had made her appearance without the least resemblance to Joe, Mrs. Bell had taken the child's likeness to the ex-ballet girl as a personal affront. Even though the poor young mother expiated her offence by dying, it was a long time before Bonnie had been accepted as a grand-child by Mrs. Bell; but when both Joe and his father went the way of all flesh, the desolate woman's heart had turned to the only tie that was left her in this world, and had centred all its interests upon it since. Bonnie was very pretty, but she was very strange. A casual observer, seeing her stand in the doorway of her grandmother's shop, with her hands on her hips, and her eyes fixed on vacancy, would have thought she was not quite right in her mind. She was just eighteen, and had a supple, well-rounded figure of the middle height. Her complexion was delicate as a wild-rose leaf; *her light brown* hair, which was thick, and soft, and

short, was always in a "fluffy" condition; her hands and feet were shapely for her station in life. But the most curious feature about Bonnie Bell was the colour of her eyes: this was neither blue nor grey, but a sort of mauve tint, like the petals of a wood violet, and there was a far-away dreamy look about the eyes themselves, that gave the girl an "uncanny" appearance. The superstitious thought she had the faculty of seeing spirits, but Bonnie Bell would have frightened herself to death over such a supposition. She knew she was absent, because her grandmother was always accusing her of "wandering;" but she would have experienced much difficulty in telling of what her dreams were composed, when she was not attending to her daily duties. She only knew that she disliked the dull street in which they lived, and longed to be a rich lady, and able to go to strange countries that she had seen before, and of which Mr. Waverley had sometimes spoken to her.

Mr. Alfred Waverley was Mrs. Bell's lodger, and to Bonnie fell, naturally, the greater share of waiting on him. There were some neat little rooms above the greengrocer's shop, and ever since the deaths of her husband and son, Mrs. Bell had been in the habit of letting two of them to a single man. After what has been written of her distaste to the

profession of Bonnie's mother, it will sound surprising, perhaps, that she should have let her rooms to an actor. But "beggars cannot be choosers," as the old woman was fond of saying; and "to have a 'play-actor' sleeping in your spare bed, and to have him a-calling you 'mother,' is two very different things." Besides, this "play-actor" was very seldom at home, and was consequently little trouble. Mrs. Bell's first floor was let at a very moderate rental; and the young gentleman retained it for the purpose of keeping his books and the larger half of his wardrobe there, whilst he travelled about the provinces in the pursuit of his profession. He often visited London, though. Whenever he had a spare day and found himself sufficiently near to render it worth while, he would burst into the greengrocer's shop and tear up to his rooms without any warning, bringing Mrs. Bell's "heart into her mouth" with ordering ham and eggs and beefsteaks to be cooked just as she was sitting down to a comfortable cup of tea. Mr. Alfred Waverley, however, was a gentleman, and his landlady recognised the fact and served him all the better for it. He never swore an oath at her, nor took a liberty with Bonnie; and she was disposed to look with more lenient eyes on the whole dramatic profession for his sake.

"If they was only all like Mr. Waverley," she

would say, "I should withdraw my opinion of the theater altogether."

Mrs. Bell's customers did not, as a rule, lie amongst the upper classes, but she was obliged to be all the more particular concerning the goods she vended on that account. The servants of the rich will buy anything, particularly when they get a percentage on all the stale vegetables consumed in their master's kitchen; but it is not an easy task to cheat the poor who market for themselves. Mrs. Bell's cabbages and carrots and turnips had to be of the freshest, or her customers rejected them with scorn. And no one supplied her better than Kit Masters, who took his cart into Covent Garden Market each morning, buying up the cheapest and best of everything, and had disposed of his whole stock-in-trade to the smaller greengrocers of the town before the afternoon.

Mrs. Bell always attended to the stocking of the shop herself. Bonnie was "a deal too daft and dreamy" to be entrusted to choose fruit or purchase vegetables.

"La, bless ye! Kit Masters," she cried, on one of these mornings in June of which I write, as she appeared on the threshold of her domains, shading the sun from her eyes: "here's a picture of fruit! Well, I never did see sich strawberries! Queen's,

aren't they? Why, each berry's as perfect as my emery cushin. And is them figs you've got in a'ready? Bless me! they is early. But they won't do for me, Kit. My customers can't afford to look at 'em yet; and them raspberries I got yesterday, I was obliged to let go at a dead loss. Why, they'd sunk half-way down the basket afore night. We must have another sack of them taters—King's Regents—the same as afore. They're real good; I haven't heard a complaint of 'em. Just hand me down a dozen bunches of wallflowers, and a few moss-roses, will ye? Bonnie makes 'em up so neat for the button-hole. They seem to take wonderful with the gents of an evening."

"Aye, aye, missus; and how's Bonnie?" said Kit Masters.

"She's fairly, thank ye; mopes a bit, you know, but that was allays her way. She ain't over and above strong."

"Ah! she ought to 'ave a good 'usband to see after 'er; that's what Bonnie wants, in my opinion. Some one as could take 'er about a bit, as it might be in my cart, and let her see the world. I fancy it must be dull for a young gal, 'biding in this street all day."

"May be! I never found it dull, Kit Masters; *but then I don't* come of a theater mother. That's

been the ruin of Bonnie, to my thinking. The blood will come out, you know, and she don't seem to have a mind to settle down to anything."

"That's nonsense, begging your pardon, Mrs. Bell. The gal will settle down fast enough, when she's married. Could I be speaking a word with you in the back parlour, now?"

"In course, Kit. Come in and have a glass of beer. You're allays welcome, as I needn't tell ye."

The old woman withdrew into the back parlour, which was a tiny three-cornered room partitioned off from the shop, and Kit Masters, having given his horse the order to stand, followed her there and drank the glass of ale she proffered him.

"Thank ye kindly, ma'am," he said, as he drew the cuff of his velveteen sleeve across his mouth. "And now what I wants to say to you is this. I never was a man of many words, and so you'll excuse abruptness; but I likes Bonnie, and I've a mind to marry her, if you says 'Amen' to the banns."

As he stood opposite to Mrs. Bell he seemed a man well-to-do enough, but terribly coarse, as a costermonger naturally would be. He had not bad features, but they were overcast by a look of animalism that quite obliterated their beauty, and he evidently had not a soul above onions and potatoes.

He was substantially dressed in corduroy trousers and velveteen coat and waistcoat, and he wore a crimson silk necktie and a rose in his button-hole. He had not shaved that morning, or perhaps the morning before; but, taken all in all, he was a very fair specimen of the sort of lover a greengrocer's granddaughter might hope to attract. Mrs. Bell did not appear at all overcome by the suddenness of Kit's announcement. Perhaps she had expected it. Perhaps it was not the first time that some one had come wooing after Bonnie Bell.

"Well, Kit Masters," she replied, "I suppose you makes enough to keep her, and it's not *I* as would raise an objection to the marriage; but Bonnie is not like other girls—there's no denying she's a bit queer in her thoughts and ways, and I'm not over sure as she'd make you a good wife."

"I'll take my chance of that," replied the costermonger, with a look that said he'd like to see the woman he couldn't master; "so it needn't be no obstacle. As to my means, I never makes less than two pound a week, come rain or shine, and if that ain't enough to keep her like a lady, I don't know what is."

"Lor'! it's ample, Kit Masters, and she may think herself lucky to get it. I wish I was sure of allays *making half* that money. I'd call myself a rich

woman. But you've no shop to pay the rent on, that's where it is."

"True for you, missus; but I keeps my horse and cart, you see, and Bonnie could have a ride with me every day of her life. She'd be gay enough spending her time riding about town, and seeing hacrobats and Punch and Judies and whatnot at every corner. So, if you can settle the matter with her, well and good, and I'm ready as soon as she may be."

"La, no, man! If there's to be any coortin' atween you, you must do it yourself. I can't undertake to do nothin' with Bonnie, for she's a queer-fangled one, as I said before, and has allays been minded to have her own way. But if you can bring her round to your thinking, I shan't make any bobbery about it."

"But I never seem to have a chance of seeing her," remarked Kit Masters, ruefully, as he scratched his head. "I don't know if it's done a purpose; but she's never in the way when I come of a mornin'."

"Well, that's my doin', and no one's fault 'cept her own. She's so main silly, I can't trust 'er to buy nothin' but it's sure to be wrong. So I sets her to work upstairs instead. However, you've got the orders for this morning, so, if this affair ain't drove

them out of your head again, I'll just step up and send her down to help carry 'em in with ye. So good-day, Kit Masters, and good luck to ye," concluded Mrs. Bell, as she ascended to the upper story.

In a few minutes Bonnie appeared in the shop, ready to help Kit with the vegetables. She was looking very lovely that morning. The soft June air and gentle heat had sent a warmer flush into her cheeks, and her eyes were like a summer's sky, seen through the purple mist of a coming shower. She smiled pleasantly but vaguely at the amorous costermonger, as she stood in the open doorway with outstretched hands ready to receive the articles that should be handed down to her. But Kit was in too gallant a mood to permit Bonnie to do any hard work. If he placed a cabbage in her hands he followed her into the shop to see where she disposed of it, and pressed up so closely against her as to extract a reprimand from her lips.

"What are you shoving me for in that way, Kit Masters?" she demanded sharply. "Can't you keep your distance? I don't want you to tell me where to place the things."

"But if I likes to do it, is there any harm, Bonnie?"

"Yes; a deal, if you wants to know. The shop

ain't so big that there's room for more than's needed in it, so if you'll keep outside, you will be doing me a service."

"Why do you speak so unkind to me, Bonnie?"

"I don't know what I says unkind. I've got my business to do, and you've got yours. Suppose we each sticks to our own."

"Ah! but I've got some business inside as p'r'aps you don't guess on. Your grandmother do, though. She and I have been talkin' it over together, and she says if you're agreeable, so is she."

"That's all right then; if you and grandmother gets on so well together, there's no need for nothin' more to be said on the matter. It don't concern me, whatever it is, that's certain."

"But it *do* concern you, Bonnie, more than anybody, except myself."

"Oh! do it? Well, just hand in them potatoes, will you? I've got my upstairs rooms to clean yet, and can't waste all my mornin' talking here to you."

Kit scratched his head again with perplexity, as he noticod the girl's complete indifference to him, and wondered by what means he should make her listen to his suit. In another minute he staggered into the shop, under the burthen of a sack of potatoes.

"Well, they're main heavy," he said, wiping his forehead with a bright cotton handkerchief. "It's real summer weather now, ain't it, Bonnie? Don't you sometimes think of the river and the green fields, and how pleasant it would be to sit down alongside of 'em?"

"Aye, that I do!" replied the girl, with the dreamy far-away look in her eyes, "and wish ever so much I could leave this horrid street, with its noise and clatter and nasty smells. How beautiful it must be in the fields now, with the buttercups and daisies! Lor'! I think sometimes if I was took there, I should die of pleasure."

"No, you wouldn't, Bonnie!" exclaimed Kit, eagerly; "you'd feel ever so much better for the smell of the flowers and the sight of the water. I'll take you there, my gal, if you'll come along o' me. My work's over by three o'clock, and if you'll only say the word I'll get a fresh 'oss and drive you over to Richmond or some of them places, this very arternoon. Will you come, Bonnie?"

"No, I don't want to go along of *you*!" replied the girl, decidedly. "Hand in them strawberries, Kit, and the flowers, and look sharp about it, for I want to go back to grandmother."

"Why, one would think my cart would pison *you*, to judge by your looks," said Masters, in-

dignantly. "You might give a civil answer, I should think, to a civil offer. 'Tain't every gal as would say 'no' to a ride in *my* cart, I can tell ye."

"Why don't you take 'em then?" was the quick rejoinder. "It would be a pity to waste your rides on them as don't want 'em."

"Won't nothing I can say soften your heart, Bonnie?" he asked, as he placed the final order on the counter.

"I don't know as it wants softening. Grandmother says I'm a deal too 'soft' a'ready."

"Aye! but not in the right way. It's a sweetheart you wants to soften your heart; a sweetheart such as I'd be to you."

"You my sweetheart!" exclaimed the girl, reddening. "Get along! you don't know what you're talking on."

"But I do, and your grandmother knows it too, and she wants us to be sweethearts, Bonnie, and to be married into the bargain. Come now! What do you say to that?"

"Us to be sweethearts!" repeated Bonnie, contemptuously. "That would be a pretty muddle. Why, I hates the sight of you?"

"Oh, you hates the sight of me, do you!" cried Kit, becoming coarse as he became natural; "and you thinks our sweethearting would be a pretty

muddle! You wants a lesson taught you, my beauty, and I'll teach it you too, before you're a minute older." And leaping over the little counter, Kit Masters seized Bonnie Bell in his rough embrace, and implanted several kisses on her blooming cheek.

If he had tried to murder her, she could hardly have shrieked louder. She struggled violently to free herself from the hold of the costermonger, and as soon as she had gained the command of her hands she inflicted several hard blows—as hard as ever she could give them—upon his face with her open palm. The passers-by heard the noise, but thought nothing of it. The cries of drunken women, the screams of children, and the oaths of men were sounds too common in that back street to attract attention. If they had glanced into the open shop and seen a pretty girl struggling in the arms of a man, they would only have smiled to themselves and passed on. Kit Masters laughed at the impotency of the blows which were showered upon him, but his cheek burnt under the insult they conveyed nevertheless. Bonnie's hand was not a light one. She was no delicate nymph, this daughter of the people, although her appearance was more refined than that of the generality of her class. But she screamed as if she had gone mad. Her purplish *eyes turned black* as a thunder-cloud with passion,

and as soon as she was free she rushed from the shop and ran upstairs. The costermonger got into his cart and drove rapidly away. He did not care to make his discomfiture patent to the neighbourhood. And Bonnie was met at the head of the stairs by Mrs. Bell, who was all anxiety to learn the reason of the discord.

"La, child! has a wops or any of them nasty insecs got among the fruit and stung ye? I declare you've give me sich a turn, I feel as if my insides was going round. Whatever on earth can be the matter?"

"He kissed me, grandmother—that brute downstairs—he dared to kiss me!" panted Bonnie, as she burst into a flood of tears.

"La! and is that all? Well, I never! here's a work about nothing! I thought at the very least that you was badly hurted. Gals didn't make sich a fuss over a kiss when *I* was young. But I suppose the lad hadn't shaved this morning, and your ladyship's cheek is too delicate to bear the touch of his rough chin. La's me! what 'll ye come to?"

"He shan't do it again!" exclaimed Bonnie, with the exasperation of a little tigress, as she flew to the bedroom and dashed cold water over her face and head. "Kit Masters had better try it on again with me—*that's all*. It's blood, and not water,

I'll wash it out with next time. I hate him, and I'll kill him—I'll *kill* him if ever he dares lay a finger on me again!"

"I believe you're stark staring mad," said her grandmother, angrily. "The man's an honest man enough. If you don't want to marry him, there's no one to force you do it; but you needn't go on raving as if he'd tried to murder ye."

"It's worse than murder, a deal," cried the girl, with her eyes still blazing. "I shouldn't feel nothing of that when 'twas once over; but I don't think my face will ever seem the same to me again, now he's touched it."

"Lord ha' mercy on us! You're a born fool!" said Mrs. Bell, as she turned away and went downstairs, out of all patience with her extraordinary grandchild.

Left to herself, all the passion faded out of Bonnie's face, leaving it a deadly white instead. She halted for a minute when her grandmother had parted with her, gazing into vacancy.

"I wonder if I *am* mad," she whispered, in a half-frightened voice. "I wonder if I shall go wild some day, all of a sudden, and bite grandmother and the rest of 'em. I don't fancy as I shall, but I know what would drive me to it sooner than *anything else*, and that would be biding along of Kit

Masters. But it feels bad to be as I've been—very, very bad; and it makes me cold, too, just as if the sun had gone in and the rain was a-coming.”

She shivered slightly as she spoke, and passing into the next room, which belonged to their lodger, resumed the work of sweeping and dusting, in which she had been interrupted. It was a very plainly furnished little apartment, but neat and clean. The white-washed walls were decorated with a lot of prints cut from the illustrated papers, which Alfred Waverley had coloured and stuck there himself. There was a considerable amount of artistic taste shown in the arrangement of the subjects, which, in Bonnie's eyes, formed a regular picture gallery. There were representations of Roman and Spanish fruit and water-carriers, of foreign landscapes, of balls given at the Queen's palace, of races, and royal weddings, and all sorts of wonderful things that Bonnie had only dreamt of.

But she seemed to know all about them from the pictures, before which she had so often stood with Mr. Waverley, whilst he attempted to describe the scenes they depicted to her. She was accustomed to stand before those same pictures in his absence, and repeat to herself what he had said concerning them, like a little child conning over its lesson, until her grandmother told her to “leave off that mutter-

ing" and take her part in the domestic duties of the house.

In one corner of the lodger's room stood an old portmanteau, which had evidently been an expensive article when new, though it had done good service by that time. There had been initials or a name stamped into the leathern cover, but the letters had been cut away with a penknife, leaving an unsightly blemish. An iron-bedstead, washing-stand, and chest of drawers, completed the furniture of the apartment. They were all as bright as elbow-grease could make them, yet Bonnie kept rubbing them mechanically with the duster she held in her hand, as if her thoughts had travelled far away from her grandmother's first floor. Once, as she had dusted the old portmanteau for about the twentieth time, she stooped and kissed its ugly, hard, disfigured leathern lid. She was creeping round the room again in her vague uncertain manner, when a sharp call from below sent the rich blood mantling to her cheek. Bonnie had awakened from her dream. The duster dropped from her hand, and she moved rapidly to the head of the staircase.

"Do you want me, grandmother?"

"In course I wants you! What else should I call your name for? Here, come down quick! there's *a gentleman* waiting to speak to you."

CHAPTER IV.

"YOU ARE A RICH MAN, MR. VIVIAN."

"A GENTLEMAN waiting to speak to her!"

Could it be Mr. Waverley, who had returned unexpectedly, as he so frequently did? In another moment Bonnie's apron was off, her cotton sleeves were unrolled to her wrists, and she had descended to the level of the shop. But the visitor who waited her there was not Alfred Waverley: he was a complete stranger, and he had evidently come on some business unconnected with their trade, as her grandmother had given him a seat in the back parlour.

"Bonnie," exclaimed Mrs. Bell, as soon as the girl made her appearance, "do you know when Mr. Waverley will be 'ome again?"

"I—," stammered Bonnie; "how should I tell, grandmother? You know how he comes and goes, just for all the world like lightning."

"I suppose that this young lady," observed the stranger, deferentially, "sees a good deal of the young gentleman in question?"

He was a foxy little man in appearance, with the eye of a hawk, and the nose of a weasel, and a general look of extreme cunning about him. He was, in fact, the lawyer, Mr. Rufus Farthingale.

"Well, sir," replied Mrs. Bell, apologetically, "you see she waits on his rooms, and so forth. I'm not so young as I was, sir. I've buried my husband for fifteen years, and I begin to feel the stairs terrible. Indeed, if it wasn't for Mary here, who's my granddaughter, I couldn't stand the trouble and fatigue of a lodger; but she carries up his trays and makes his bed, and, naterally, sees and hears more of him than I do."

"Exactly, I quite understand; and so perhaps Miss Mary will be able to afford us the clue that we require."

Bonnie glanced at Mrs. Bell with an air of complete bewilderment. She did not understand what Mr. Farthingale was talking about.

"Speak up!" cried her grandmother, sharply.

"What am I to say?" she uttered, with her most absent look and manner.

"La bless me! I've no patience with you. Why, you're to answer this gentleman's questions, to be sure."

"I have reason to believe," commenced the lawyer, "that your lodger is staying here under an assumed name, and I want you to tell me all you can about him. Tell me everything you can think of, never mind how trivial: the smallest circumstances are sometimes of importance. For instance, *how long has he been away this time?*"

"Is it anything to hurt him?" demanded Bonnie, slowly.

"Bless the gal! do this gentleman look like a murderer?" cried Mrs. Bell, who had already been promised a handsome bonus by Mr. Farthingale, if she would aid him in his search. "But I can answer for that question, sir. Mr. Waverley's bin away from London now nigh upon seven weeks."

"'Twill be eight weeks to-morrow," interrupted Bonnie, eagerly.

"This young lady has an excellent memory," observed the lawyer. "Did he tell you where he was going, Miss Mary?"

"No, sir; but I can guess where he is."

"Will you have the goodness to tell me, then?"

"If you'll tell me your business with 'im."

At this show of independence on Bonnie's part, Mrs. Bell was properly indignant.

"Well, I never! where's your manners? Is that the way to speak to a rale gentleman? Take them hands of yours out of your pockets, Bonnie, and answer as you're told." And then she continued in a lower key, "You must please to excuse 'er, sir, for she's not over strong in her head, poor thing!"

"I'm strong enough to keep my mouth shut till I hear why I am to open it," replied Bonnie, stoutly.

"But I am quite ready to satisfy your curiosity," said Mr. Farthingale; "you've no need of suspicion, I can assure you. I have very good news for Mr. Waverley, should he prove to be the gentleman I believe him to be; and the greatest kindness his friends can do him, is to give me every information where he can be found."

"Good news is it, sir?" said Bonnie. "Then he's sure to be round again to hear it for himself before long. I know nothing about where he's gone to."

"Why, Bonnie!" exclaimed her grandmother, "I remember your telling me the name of the place the very day Mr. Waverley left us, only it's gone out of my head. And didn't you send his clean collars arter 'im in a parcel? You *must* know where he's gone to."

The lawyer thought to himself, "Either this girl is ignorant, or she is obstinate." He looked in her face and decided it was the latter.

"Perhaps Miss Mary will be able to remember if we give her time," he said.

"No! I can't remember nothing about it. It's gone clean out of my head, like it has out of grandmother's."

"Well, well! don't trouble yourself on the matter," *replied the lawyer*, with professional policy. "If Mr.

Waverley is the person I take him to be, he will be only too glad to send me his own address, as soon as his friends let him know I require it. Can you describe him to me?"

"Oh! he's beautiful!" cried Bonnie, eagerly. "His 'air's as black as night, and so be his eyes a'most; and he's got very slim feet and 'ands, and a soft skin without any 'air on it, and his teeth is as white as milk, and——"

"'Art alive!" exclaimed Mrs. Bell, who had been listening with an open mouth to this tirade, "I never thought 'im 'alf as 'andsome as that! If you'd asked *me*, sir, I should have said 'e was a personable young man enough, with dark eyes and 'air, and a genteel figger—but that's all."

"Ah! ladies' opinions often differ on such subjects, but your information is equally valuable. And now, Miss Mary," continued the lawyer, after having made sundry notes in his pocket-book, "as you have the care of Mr. Waverley's rooms, can you allow me to look round them for a moment?"

"Grandmother," said Bonnie, seriously, "them rooms is in our charge, you know, and I can't see as we've the right of showing 'em to strangers."

"Why, it can't 'urt 'em for the gentleman jist to walk round. He won't touch nothing."

"You may take *my* word for it, I will not; in

fact, I should wish you both to accompany me whilst I make my tour of inspection."

"Nothing can be fairer than that," quoth Mrs. Bell, as she preceded the visitor and her granddaughter up the stairs.

The bedroom was entered first. There was positively nothing to look at there, except the old portmanteau, which Mr. Farthingale examined carefully, but was quite unsuccessful in his attempt to decipher what initials had originally been stamped upon it.

The sitting-room seemed equally void of any proofs of the identity of its owner. Every article of consequence had been carefully stowed away in the cupboards when Mr. Waverley left them, and even the importance of his search could not have justified the lawyer in breaking the sanctity of lock and key.

"Them be his books," said Mrs. Bell, with an air of contempt, as she pointed to a pile of those small pamphlets stitched in fawn and blue coloured wrappers which are so familiar to theatrical eyes. "You know, perhaps, sir, that the poor young gentleman is nothing but a play-actor, and I hope you won't think the worse of me and Mary for letting the rooms to 'im; but I've allays thought somehow *as he'd bin* misfortunate in his anteriors, and it has

never bin my plan to be 'ard on them as has come down in their living."

"It does you honour, madam," replied Mr. Farthingale, as he opened the fly-leaf of each play-book successively. But no name met his eye except that of Alfred Waverley. It was evident that if the young man were living under an assumed title he was determined to keep it.

"Well! I am really much obliged to you for the trouble you've taken, but I can't make out anything from all this," he said at last, as he slipped something into Mrs. Bell's hand, and turned to quit the room. "Hullo! what's that?"

He was pointing to a very indistinct and badly-executed photograph of a statue of Psyche, that was stuck carelessly in the frame of a common engraving.

"You mustn't touch that, sir!" exclaimed Bonnie, with needless caution.

"Oh! it belongs to Mr. Alfred Waverley, then? Did he bring it here with him?"

"Yes, sir," replied the old woman, "and he's got a lot more of faces, and sich like; locked away in his portmanteau."

"Ah, indeed!—I'd swear that's a specimen of the old general's bad photography," said Mr. Farthingale to himself, as he examined the faded picture; "and

if I'm not greatly mistaken, that cast of Psyche stood on the landing in their house in Portman Square. I believe my unknown informant is correct, and that I've hit the right nail on the head at last. —Perhaps you've thought of the place where Mr. Waverley went by this time?" he continued to Bonnie.

"No, I haven't!" returned the girl, almost sullenly.

The lawyer exchanged glances of intelligence with Mrs. Bell.

"Try and get it out of her," he whispered, "and I'll look in again this afternoon to hear if you succeeded."

He gave the loose money in his waistcoat pocket a significant rattle as he concluded, and bidding the two women "Good-morning," hastily left them to themselves.

"Well, of all the obstinacy I ever see or heard of," exclaimed Mrs. Bell, as soon as he was gone, "this beats it. Bonnie! I'm as sure you knows the name of that place as that I sits here; but shaking wouldn't get it out of you if you're so inclined. Why couldn't you give the gentleman a straight answer? It's the loss of sovereigns to me."

"*Sovereigns!*" cried the girl, contemptuously, "what's sovereigns compared to his safety? How do *you know* what that foxy-faced old rat wanted of

Mr. Waverley? Pr'aps he meant to put him in prison. How would you feel then if I'd given up the name of the place he's hiding in?"

"Nonsense! Didn't ye hear 'im say 'twas good news he'd got for 'im."

"I must do more than *hear* before I betrays 'im. Is it likely an old fellow like that would come sniffing about these rooms for any good?"

"I can't say, but if Mr. Waverley does owe money, he should pay it, that's all. I've allays bin honest myself, and I don't 'old with folks as isn't."

"Who dares to say 'e isn't honest?" cried Bonnie, flaring up in defence of the absent.

"La! you've no call to fly at me in that fashin. You was the first to think this gentleman had come to take 'im up. But my opinion's this, that if Mr. Waverley is the gentleman we takes 'im to be——"

"What then?" demanded a joyous voice from the landing, and in another moment Alfred Waverley himself, carrying a little black bag in his hand, burst into the room and confronted them.

Mrs. Bell, not knowing how much of her conversation concerning him had been overheard, gave a little shriek of surprise and consternation at his unexpected appearance; but Bonnie turned as white as a sheet, and trembled violently all over.

"Talk of an angel, you see, Mrs. Bell, and you're

sure to hear the rustling of his wings," exclaimed the lodger, as he threw down his bag and umbrella, and divested himself of his dust-coat.

He was a very handsome man, and possessed a face full of varying expression and passionate energy. His dark hair was brushed back off a broad forehead, in which the anterior lobes were well developed; his dark-grey eyes were fringed with black lashes; and a small moustache, which had evidently not long been permitted to grow, shaded his upper lip. He looked like a man whose feelings would be quickly and powerfully excited, and might as suddenly fade away.

He was glowing as a southern sky without the ever-present sun hid behind the clouds, for the lines of his mouth betrayed a determination which went far to neutralise the softness of his eyes.

"Bless me! Mr. Waverley! you 'ave took us of a sudden this time. Wherever 'ave you sprung from, sir?"

"Why, Birmingham, to be sure. My time was up there yesterday, and I go to Swansea on Monday. Bonnie knew my address."

"There now! I said as much," exclaimed Mrs. Bell, shaking her finger at Bonnie. "Oh, you obstinate little creetur!"

"*What has Bonnie been obstinate about?*" de-

manded Alfred Waverley, looking kindly at the girl. "Bonnie, you haven't said '*how d'ye do?*' to me yet," he continued, as he offered her his hand.

The one she gave him in return was cold as death.

"I hope there's nothing wrong!" said the young man, as he looked from Mrs. Bell to her granddaughter.

"No, sir, nothing to speak of; only there's bin a gennelman here this morning askin' arter you, and wanting your address, and nothing on earth would make this gal give up the place you was a-stoppin' at."

"Oh, that's a mistake, Bonnie! You must always let people know where I am staying. It might be a manager, you know, who wanted to give me work."

"This wasn't a manager," replied Bonnie, shaking her head. "He was a nasty-lookin' chap—summat in the law, I fancy—and I was afraid he might take your goods, sir, or do some malice of that sort."

Alfred Waverley burst out laughing.

"He wouldn't find much to satisfy him here, Bonnie. A couple of dozen old play-books, and a portmanteau full of worn-out linen. But you needn't be afraid another time. I don't owe a man a shilling, and no one would come asking for me here who wasn't my friend."

"That's just *what the gentleman said, sir,*" inter-

posed Mrs. Bell, eagerly; "and 'e's got the very best of news for ye—summat that's very good indeed—and 'e said as soon as ever you 'eard who 'e was, you'd send your address immediate, and be glad to."

"Good news for me," repeated Alfred Waverley, gravely. "What on earth can he mean? How did he ask for me?"

"He walked into the shop, jist like any other mortal, sir, and asked downright for Mr. Halfred Waverley. And as 'e couldn't get your address out of this gal, 'e said 'e'd look in agen by-and-by to see if I had called it to mind myself."

"Oh, very good," said her lodger, looking relieved at her statement. "I shall be very glad to see the gentleman when he calls again; but unless he's a manager, or one of my old pals, I can't imagine what he can want with me. And now, my good Mrs. Bell, will you send me up a chop, or some bread and cheese, or anything you've got in the house? for I'm starving."

"Bonnie, you cut over to the butcher's, and get a chop for Mr. Waverley, and then lay his cloth as quick as you can, while I cooks it."

Bonnie did not require a second bidding. The finest chop in the butcher's shop was frizzling on *the gridiron* in another five minutes, and she was

demurely preparing the table in the lodger's room for its reception.

"Bonnie," said Alfred Waverley, "why were you so afraid to give that gentleman my address in Birmingham?"

"Just why I told you, sir. I thought you might owe somebody a few shillings, p'raps; and I wasn't going to be the one to set a lot of thieves on your track."

"Thank you, my dear little girl. It was a very kind and friendly thought; but you needn't have been afraid. As I said before, I have no debts, and fear no man. I am rather curious, though, to hear what this gentleman can want with me."

"He opened all your books, and read your name," said Bonnie, in an aggrieved tone; "and he said 'twasn't your own, and he believe you'd got another."

"*What!*" exclaimed Alfred Waverley, starting from his chair.

"Another name, sir, beside Waverley. I knew 'twas nonsense, though play-actors do 'ave two names sometimes, I've 'eard grandmother say."

"Yes, yes; of course it's all nonsense," replied the lodger, reseating himself. "However, if the gentleman returns, I should like to speak to him. How beautifully clean you have kept my rooms

whilst I have been away, Bonnie! It seems a long time since I was here last, doesn't it?"

"Terrible long," acquiesced the girl, in a low voice.

"I've been making a lot of friends in Birmingham, and a lot of money into the bargain."

"I'm very glad of that, sir."

"Yes; I don't know when I've been so successful in my profession before. They want me to go back there as soon as I've finished my engagement at Swansea. But I'd rather get something to do at old Drury Lane. I miss London life very much, Bonnie; and I miss you into the bargain. I've never found such another 'neat-handed little Phillis' to keep my rooms tidy and chat to me all the time I'm taking my meals. The girl who waited on me at Birmingham was so ugly, I never rang the bell except I was absolutely obliged."

Bonnie laughed softly to herself at this announcement.

"And how have you been getting on in my absence?" continued Mr. Waverley; "got any new lovers, Bonnie, eh?"

"*Lovers!*" repeated the girl; "I never have none—I don't care for 'em."

"*Oh, now, Bonnie, that's a story. You know*

Kit Masters is awfully sweet upon you. He used to bring you flowers every day this spring. Haven't you made up your mind to marry him yet?"

Bonnie's face paled and flushed alternately with emotion, and Alfred Waverley went on teasing her, until he saw her eyes were full of tears.

"Why, what's up now, child? You're surely not going to cry over a harmless joke. If you don't marry Kit Masters, it will be somebody else, you know. You're a great deal too pretty, Bonnie, to go without a husband."

"But I will," said Bonnie, through her tears. "I hate 'em all; I don't want none of 'em: I mean to bide as I am."

"Oh, you little vixen!" exclaimed Waverley, laughing, as she ran downstairs to fetch his mutton-chop.

He was still sitting over the luncheon-tray, ruminating what he should do with himself that evening, and wondering what business the visitor of the morning could possibly have to transact with him, when he was told that the same gentleman had returned, and was waiting below.

"Show him up," said Waverley, and the next minute the lawyer stood upon the threshold.

"I am fortunate, sir," he commenced, but as soon

as he caught sight of the young man's face, he changed his tone.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "it is as I thought and you are Vivian Chasemore."

"Mr. Farthingale," said the other, "however did you trace me here?"

"I will tell you in a minute. We have been looking for you for the last two months. Meanwhile I hope you will shake hands with me."

"With pleasure," returned Vivian; "I have no grudge against you, Mr. Farthingale; but if you come here with any intent to try and persuade me to retake my place in society, I forewarn you it will be useless. Had I ever contemplated such a step, my father's death would have put an end to it. There is no motive now to induce me to alter my way of living. I have chosen my path in life, and I mean to stick to it."

"Just so, Mr. Chasemore; and I bring you news that will render you more independent still. There is no need now, sir, that you should follow anything but your own fancy for the future."

"I don't understand you, Mr. Farthingale."

"You are a rich man, Mr. Vivian."

"A rich man?"

"*I mean what I say.* You doubtless learnt from

the newspapers, two months ago, of the death of your grandfather, Sir Peregrine Chasemore."

"I did; but my father sold the reversionary interest of his small expectations from that quarter in favour of his widow; so I knew there could be nothing for me."

"On the contrary, there is everything. By your grandfather's will you inherit the whole of his private fortune—*fifty thousand pounds!*"

Vivian Chasemore looked bewildered.

"Fifty thousand pounds! Are you making a fool of me, Mr. Farthingale?"

"I am telling you the bare truth, sir."

"Then what becomes of my cousin Arthur?"

"He took nothing but his father's original portion of five thousand pounds."

"Is that just?"

"It was Sir Peregrine's will, Mr. Chasemore. And now, how soon will you take possession of your property?"

"Give me one moment to gain my breath again. *Fifty thousand pounds!* It seems incredible. I feel like a Croesus! Whatever made my old grand-dad think of me after that fashion?"

"He names you in his will as his favourite grand-child, and I suppose that is sufficient reason for the

bequest. But come now, Mr. Vivian, you must not remain here!"

"Where am I to go?"

"Come home with me—at least for to-night. I will try and get your cousin Sir Arthur to meet you at dinner, and my daughter will be delighted to receive you. This will give you time to think over your prospects, and you can settle up everything here to-morrow. Will you come?"

"I will," said Vivian Chasemore.

CHAPTER V.

"KEEP HER IN THE DARK."

As soon as Mr. Farthingale had safely deposited Vivian Chasemore in the care of the delighted Selina, he flew round to communicate the news of his success to Sir Arthur, and not finding him at his chambers, was directed by his housekeeper to Lady William's apartments, where, as I have already related, he interrupted a very interesting conversation between the object of his search and Regina Nettle-ship. When Mr. Farthingale plumply asked the baronet to go round with him at once and welcome his cousin, Sir Arthur did not well see how he could *refuse the request*. To have shown any unwilling-

ness in the matter, would have looked like disappointment at Vivian's return, so he was fain to comply. The presence of Mr. Farthingale prevented his doing more than bid Regina a formal farewell, though he looked unutterable things in doing so, which she pretended not to see, for the intelligence that the lawyer had brought them had fallen on her like a sudden blow.

"I will certainly accompany you to see my cousin Vivian," said Sir Arthur to Mr. Farthingale, "and you must relate to me the whole story of his recovery on our way. I cannot tell you the relief I feel at hearing of his safety. I had almost made up my mind that he was dead."

"And you will dine with us?" asked the little lawyer, eagerly.

"With pleasure! Miss Nettleship," he continued to Regina, "I have to leave you very hurriedly, but the cause admits of no delay. I trust I shall see you to-morrow."

But Regina had already lost her interest in seeing him. She required time for consideration, and invented an engagement on the spot.

"Not to-morrow, Sir Arthur. Mamma and I are engaged out for the whole day."

"Indeed! I *am* sorry! The next day, then?"

"I am not *sure* of what mamma may have ar-

ranged for us even then, but should we be at home we shall be most happy to receive you; and your cousin Vivian also, if you like to bring him," she added politely.

"Many thanks. I cannot answer for Vivian, but I certainly can for myself. And now, Mr. Farthingale, I am at your service."

As they drove to the lawyer's house, Sir Arthur heard the whole history that is already known to the reader; and when they arrived there, they found Vivian Chasemore alone in the drawing-room, Miss Selina having slipped away to adorn herself in her most "killing" dress for the coming dinner. The cousins, who had not seen each other for five years, had never been intimate friends, and there was a stiffness, evidently felt on both sides, in the way they greeted each other, that made Mr. Farthingale decide the best thing he could do was to leave them alone for a little while in order to conquer it.

"This is a most agreeable surprise, Vivian," were the first words Sir Arthur said after their host had quitted the room. "From your long absence and complete silence, we were almost afraid there was no chance of your turning up again."

"An agreeable surprise, do you call it? I should have thought it would have been quite the contrary *to you*," laughed his cousin. "Now, do you mean

that for politeness, Arthur, or is it your real sentiment? Because I'm an actor, you know, and used to call a spade a spade; and I would rather hear you say outright that my coming back is a great disappointment to you, than that you should carry the burden of a falsehood on your soul for my sake."

"Yes; we heard that you had been really compelled to—to—adopt the stage as a means of support," replied Sir Arthur, evading any answer to the question put to him. "What an immense change our grandfather's eccentric will has wrought for you!"

"I have to see yet whether it will be for the better," said Vivian; "I have grown to love the profession, and am not sure whether I shall be contented to live a lazy life and eat the bread of idleness. I have an engagement at Swansea to commence next Monday, and if I cannot get a substitute, I shall fulfil it."

"What an extraordinary taste!" ejaculated Sir Arthur; "this is scarcely what Sir Peregrine intended in leaving you the heir to his whole private fortune."

"I can't help it. I never asked him to leave me so, nor old Farthingale to look me up. How he found me at last, I cannot say, for I hardly ever

read a paper, and as the advertisements only mentioned me by my own name, none of my friends would have recognised they were intended for me."

"You have kept our name a secret then, I am thankful to understand."

"Strictly so! I have gone by that of Alfred Waverley ever since I left home."

"Vivian! why did you leave it?"

"Because of that abominable woman my father was fool enough to marry. No one could live in the same house with her. She was a standing disgrace, and set him against me into the bargain. Is she alive still?"

"Yes, as you will be able to judge for yourself before long. She is sure to find you out, now that you have come home, in hopes of sharing your good fortune."

"Then she will be disappointed. I'd sooner throw my money in the gutter. I say, Arthur, whatever made the grand-dad leave it to me?"

"Who can tell?" rejoined Sir Arthur, pettishly. "It's not worth discussing. I suppose the old man was in his dotage. It's yours, and that's enough."

"Of course you came into something."

"Only my father's portion of the marriage settlement."

"Are you married, Arthur?"

"No; but likely to be."

"I congratulate you."

"I conclude you'll be marrying yourself, now that you can do it so comfortably."

"Not I, my dear fellow!" laughed Vivian; "I've enjoyed my liberty too long and too much, to sell it so soon. What on earth should I marry for? To keep one horse instead of two, and live in the same house all the year round, instead of knocking about the world and seeing all that there is to be seen. No, no, Arthur! Now I've got my money I mean to spend it on my own pleasure, and not on the support of a lot of squalling brats. It's the greatest mistake a man with money can make to marry young. He might as well be a pauper at once. I think if I had remained in the profession I might have looked out for some nice little girl to keep my supper hot for me of an evening, for it's lonely work to go home to an empty lodging. But not now that I've sufficient means to entertain as much company as I choose. I mean to keep a jolly set of chambers in town, and run over to the Continent whenever I feel inclined, and leave the matrimony to you. And who knows whether you may not come into this grand fortune after all, old boy?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, that if I understand old Farthingale rightly, the money is left to me, and to my eldest son, or grandson, as the case may be; and if I die without an heir, it returns to you, or yours. So that all you have to do is to outlive me."

"What nonsense, Vivian! Half the girls in town will be after you as soon as your return has been duly advertised amongst them!"

"It will make no difference to you, Arthur. Once for all, I am not a marrying man!"

At this juncture Mr. and Miss Farthingale re-entered the room: the young lady radiant in a blue dress, which had been donned expressly with the view of fascinating the baronet. Of course she would have been ready enough to take Vivian and his fifty thousand pounds, had there been any chance of it; but Miss Selina knew better than that. The young man who has just come into his property is fastidious. The young man who has just lost his, is the very subject to accept consolation in the shape of an heiress. So the Farthingales considered, and they were wise in their generation.

The dinner passed pleasantly enough. Vivian Chasemore was in the highest spirits, and kept them all alive with his fund of anecdotes. In the course of conversation, Miss Farthingale, wishing to pay *him a compliment*, remarked "that she never should

have taken him for an actor;" and Sir Arthur capped her observation.

"Do I look too great a fool?" cried Vivian, comically.

They both hastened to assure him that was not the reason.

"Ah, I know what you mean! You expected to see me in a light coat and a scarlet necktie, with hair down to the nape of my neck, and to hear me ignore my H's, and talk with a nasal twang. Is that it?"

Sir Arthur hummed and hawed, and did not appear ready to answer the question, and Miss Selina said, with modest downcast eyes, that certainly *some* professional gentlemen whom she had accidentally met were not a bit like Mr. Vivian Chasemore.

"Because they were not gentlemen from the beginning," he argued. "It's not the profession that makes the man, but the man the profession. Had I been reduced to taking service as a grocer's help and sweeping out the shop, I only hope I should have swept it out a great deal better than an ordinary boy would have done."

"Oh, Mr. Chasemore, you are so funny!" cried Miss Selina.

"I only say what I feel, Miss Farthingale. There.

are plenty of well-bred and educated men upon the stage who retain the manners in which they were reared. There are also plenty of the other sort. But, you see, I have come forth untainted from the ordeal, and trust I shall still be found fit to retake my proper place in society."

"Who could doubt it, Mr. Chasemore?" replied the old lawyer, gaily. "I hope you mean to honour us by staying here as long as it may be convenient to yourself, sir."

"Thanks! I will accept your offer of a bed for to-night, but to-morrow I must return to my own lodgings, if only for a few hours. I have left those two poor women in a state of the greatest bewilderment. All they know is that some mysterious personage has spirited me away from them; but they have little idea it is for ever."

"Who are the women you allude to?" asked Miss Farthingale.

"My old landlady, Mrs. Bell, and her granddaughter Bonnie. Such a pretty girl! is she not, Mr. Farthingale?"

"Yes; indeed, from the little I saw of her, she appeared to me a very handsome young woman, and particularly devoted to your interests."

They all laughed at him, but Vivian was not to *be laughed out of countenance.*

"So she is, and always has been. I've lodged in her grandmother's house whenever I've been in London, for more than three years past, so Bonnie and I are old friends. She was quite a child when I first went there."

"What a curious name Bonnie is!"

"It is a nickname given her by the neighbours, on account of her pretty face. And she's as good as she's pretty. She's the best little girl in the world," said Vivian, emphatically.

Miss Selina giggled and shrugged her shoulders. She thought she sniffed a *mésalliance* in the wind. Sir Arthur sighed, and reflected what a much better use he could have made of the fifty thousand pounds. Mr. Farthingale caught the sigh, and chuckled over it. He had not quite so large a fortune to bestow upon his daughter as Sir Peregrine had left to Vivian, but there was sufficient money lying at his bank to form a very effectual salve for the baronet's disappointed hopes.

When Sir Arthur had taken his departure, and Vivian Chasemore had retired for the night, the lawyer followed his daughter into her private sitting-room to discuss the day's proceedings.

"What do you think of that young Chasemore, Selina?"

"He seems very wild, papa. He will soon

make ducks and drakes of his fifty thousand pounds!"

"So I think. However, he has no head for business, and as the money is safely in my hands now, I may be able to persuade him to leave it so. If he *will* throw it away——"

"Some of it may as well drift into our coffers as into those of less worthy people. I quite agree with you."

"Sharp girl!" responded Mr. Farthingale, patting her head. "But if so, it will only find its way eventually back to its original source,—eh, Selina? I fancy you would have no more objection to be 'my lady,' than I should to see you so!"

"Wait till I am asked, papa."

"No, my dear, that is not like your usual good sense! Gentlemen often want to have their eyes opened on these little matters. For aught I know to the contrary, Sir Arthur is not even aware that I am prepared to make a settlement upon you. And it would be an immense help to him. In fact, I don't see how he is to keep up his title without it. His present position is nothing short of beggary."

"Well, I can't say I should have any objection to get Sir Arthur over Regina Nettleship's head. *She's* been angling her very best for him, the last *three months*."

"Miss Nettleship! Nonsense! Why, she has not a penny. My dear, I tell you Sir Arthur cannot afford to marry on his present income. He has not the wherewithal even to furnish a house."

"And you'd do all that for us, papa?"

"To be sure I would. And give you a clear thousand a year to start with into the bargain."

Miss Farthingale's eyes sparkled. She thought it quite impossible that the baronet could be proof against such an array of temptations.

"By the way, my dear," continued the lawyer, "I have some news for you. Mrs. Mathers is dead, and her niece Janet Oppenheim is without a home. I have been obliged to ask her here."

"*Here!*" exclaimed Miss Selina; "not for long, I hope. You know how I hate girls."

"I don't think you'll dislike Miss Oppenheim. She seems a quiet inoffensive sort of creature. But the period of her stay here is indefinite. The fact is, Selina, I have had the charge of the old woman's property for years past, and her death was so sudden that I must have time to pull myself together a bit, before I can hand over what is due to the niece."

"I see! But hasn't Miss Oppenheim any relations?"

"None living nearer than India, and no one that takes *any interest* in her affairs. At the outside she

can't come into more than a few thousands; still, unless I have a little breathing-time, I must draw her capital from my vested funds, and that is not what I want to do just at present, so it is convenient to me to keep her in the dark as to her real position."

"Say no more, papa. I will make the best of the incubus. And, indeed, I do not know whether, after all, the companionship of a lady may not leave me freer than ever. I am terribly tied, you know, as to etiquette and all that nonsense."

"True! and you need make no fuss over Miss Oppenheim. I want her to believe that she is greatly indebted to us for the offer of a home, so put her in her proper position from the first, and make her a sort of humble companion to yourself. Take her out with you, or leave her behind, just as you think fit. I don't wish to inconvenience you in the slightest degree, Selina."

"All right, papa! And when am I to expect the young lady to arrive?"

"I shall bring her over to-morrow. She is quite alone, with the exception of a servant, and I think it as well she should leave the house before the funeral takes place. Besides it will prevent her *gossiping* over her affairs with strangers, and getting

ideas put into her head which we may find it difficult to eradicate."

As Mr. Farthingale had proposed, so it came to pass, and the following day saw Miss Janet Oppenheim an inmate of their home. The cab with her boxes and herself drove up to the door, just an hour after Vivian Chasemore had left the house to return to the lodgings in Drury Lane.

Miss Oppenheim was of the order of "catty" women. Many people would have called her good-looking, but there was a strong "feline" expression about everything she did or said. Selina Farthingale was sharp and cunning; Janet Oppenheim was intensely "sly." She had large prominent eyes of a light blue colour that were seldom raised; a long nose that drooped at the end, and a sharp-pointed chin that turned upwards, with a small puckered mouth that looked as if butter could not melt in it. Her pale straw-coloured hair was drawn plainly off her face and twisted in a coronet round her head. She was a woman who might be capable of any amount of deceit, and malice, and revenge; who might conceive it and carry it out to the end, always with the same downcast eyes and puckered mouth. She could have taken in any man, even the enemy of mankind *himself*. Everybody, in fact, except Mr.

Farthingale. She quite took in Mr. Farthingale's daughter.

When Selina first saw this soft pussy-cat creature, with the sly eyes and the low voice, she believed she could do anything she chose with her. She had intended to keep Miss Oppenheim in her presumed place from the beginning, but Janet never gave her an opportunity of doing so. She was so reserved and timid that she had to be coaxed to be made to talk at all; and her apologies for the commonest trouble taken for her, and her entreaties that no one should put themselves out of the way on her account, became painful to listen to. Miss Selina lost no time in trying to ascertain, on her papa's account, how much Janet Oppenheim knew of the position in which her aunt, Mrs. Mathers, had left her; but at the close of the interview she was obliged to confess herself unable to decide the extent of her guest's knowledge.

"It was so good of your dear papa to offer me the shelter of his home," Miss Oppenheim purred. "What should a poor girl like myself have done all alone in those lodgings? And I have never been used to do anything for myself, you see. My poor aunt was like a mother to me. I have never known what it is to have a wish ungratified."

"*That is a pity, isn't it?*" replied Selina. "So

many women have to work for their own living in this world, that it does not do to be brought up too softly, unless one has certain prospects in the future."

"True, dear Miss Farthingale; and perhaps I have been more indulged than is good for me. Still it was my dear aunt's pleasure, and she had a right to do as she chose."

"Her death must make a great change for you, does it not?"

"Ah! not whilst I am with you and your father in this charming home. I fear it is quite wrong and ungrateful of me to feel so comfortable here as I do. And will you forgive me, dear Miss Farthingale, if I say that I cannot help feeling as if you were already my friend?"

Selina was not much given to making friends with her own sex; but she stumbled over some phrase relative to her hoping Miss Oppenheim would look upon her as such, in reply. She had received a second admonition from her father to be sure and keep their guest in good temper for the present.

"I have always conceived so high an idea of what female friendship should be," murmured Janet. "I remember, when I was at school, being quite laughed at for the strength with which I handled the subject in an essay, that won the first prize in the *annual examination*."

"Where were you educated?"

"At St. Anne's College, Lymehurst. Mrs. Mathers gave me the very first advantages. She considered it quite necessary that I should be able to teach others, if so required."

"Oh! educated for a governess," thought Miss Selina; "she can't have been reared with expectations. Mrs. Mathers intended you for a teacher, then," she continued aloud.

"Until my cousin William died. He was her grandson, you know, and I am only her grandniece. But when aunt was relieved of placing him in the world, she had me home from St. Anne's at once, and I have lived with her ever since."

"Does she mean by that, that the money William was to have inherited has come to her instead?" speculated her companion.

The next words Miss Oppenheim said seemed to contradict the idea.

"How different our lots in life are, dear Miss Farthingale! You—so rich and happy, surrounded by kind relations; and poor me—alone and friendless, with so little to look forward to."

"We never can tell what is in the future for us."

"But we can pretty well guess. With all your advantages, you are sure to make a brilliant marriage before long."

Miss Selina thought of Sir Arthur, and simpered. It was really pleasant to be purred over by this flattering pussy-cat.

That remains to be seen," she answered, smiling. "I may be an old maid after all."

"Oh, never! never!" cried Miss Oppenheim, clasping her hands; "that would be an impossibility. Now, confess, dear Miss Farthingale, that you are engaged already."

"I shall confess no such thing."

"But I'm sure I'm right. To a duke, perhaps, or an earl! No? Then to a baronet, at the very least."

"Well, there are more unlikely things in the future than that I shall be 'my lady,' I must say," replied Selina, with a self-conscious air.

"I was *certain* of it. Oh, let me take a very, *very* great liberty, and ask his name."

"It is 'Sir Arthur,' but I shall not tell you a word more. You must guess all the rest for yourself."

"*Sir Arthur!* What a heavenly name! And he is tall, I feel, and noble in appearance, and very handsome."

"You will see him before long, and be able to judge for yourself. But remember he is only a friend. I am no more engaged to him than you are."

"Oh, I cannot believe that!"

"It is true, nevertheless."

"Then if you are not, you soon will be, dear Miss Farthingale, for I know it is entirely with yourself. And you will be 'my lady,' and you will let me be your very faithful, humble little friend to your life's end," exclaimed Miss Janet Oppenheim, in an ecstasy of modest enthusiasm, as she knelt beside Selina and kissed her hand.

CHAPTER VI.

"WHEN SHALL YOU BE COMING BACK?"

As Vivian Chasemore walked back from Mr. Farthingale's house in Kensington to his old lodgings in Drury Lane, he caught himself more than once whistling in the gladness of his heart, until he remembered that he was about to leave his Bohemian life behind him, and must drop his Bohemian manners at the same time. The recollection only made him happier.

He had accommodated himself to the society he had adopted, but he had never felt in his own sphere since leaving home. The etiquette of the family dinner of the evening before had revealed to *him*, as it were in a glance, how much he had

wronged himself in believing that he could give up all the amenities of social life without regret. He had left his father's house without thought, and had been too proud to sue for forgiveness afterwards. The fact is, Vivian had never had a happy home. His mother had died early, and his father been much away on foreign service, during which period the child had been left in charge of his grandparents, Sir Peregrine and Lady Chasemore. When he was twenty, however, his father, then a general, had retired from the army, and married the widow of an old brother officer, a flaunting, showy woman, of middle age. It was then poor Vivian's miseries began. He had been old enough to see all the wrong that went on under his father's very eyes, and too young to tell the old man what a fool his new wife was making of him. Quarrel after quarrel took place between his stepmother and himself, until he told her openly that her disgraceful conduct was making their name a jest and a by-word in the neighbourhood, and that he, for one, was determined to stand it no longer.

Mrs. Chasemore carried this story, with many exaggerations, to the general, who ordered his son to apologise or leave the house. Vivian chose the latter alternative. He ran away, then and there, with ten pounds in his pocket, and carried a banner

on the stage of old Drury Lane, until his talents and address gained him the notice of the manager of the theatre and a better engagement. And since that time he had been acting, here, there, and everywhere, taking chiefly the parts of old men in comedy, for which he had a peculiar *forte*, so that many of his intimate friends had watched the tottering gait and listened to the quavering voice of Alfred Waverley, without dreaming that beneath the false forehead, and wrinkles, and crows'-feet, there lay the handsome, laughing face of Vivian Chasemore. He had laughed more than he had felt inclined to do. His was a happy, buoyant temperament that made the best of everything; but he had had many lonely and desolate hours during the term of his banishment, in which the whole of life looked so dark and hopeless that he questioned whether he would not be wiser to end his perplexities with a dose of prussic acid.

That was all over now, he remembered with a joyous laugh, as he sped along from Kensington to Drury Lane. His dear old grandfather, who had been very fond of him when a little child, but whom he had never credited with so much partiality since, had left him independent for life. He had nothing to do thenceforward but enjoy himself in the society *he liked best*, and that, Vivian could not help

feeling, would be the society in which he had been reared, however grateful he might feel to those who had been his friends in exile.

Under the influence of such feelings, it was with a face even more beaming than usual that he burst into the little greengrocer's shop (how much smaller and narrower it looked even now than it had done yesterday!), where Mrs. Bell, with her work in her hand, was keeping guard behind the counter.

"La! Mr. Waverley, sir! is it you? I thought we should see you back again some time to-day; but Bonnie, she's bin fidgeting like anythink over your dinner, and a wonderin' whether you'll take this, or whether you'll take that; and as I said to 'er, what's the use, when if Mr. Waverley 'e wants anythink, 'e's sure to come 'ome and tell us so himself."

"Right as usual, Mrs. Bell! For, as it happens, I've only run over for an hour or two, to look after my things, and shall not dine here to-day at all."

"Going back to your friends, sir, I suppose? Well, I'm glad to hear it, if so be they're good friends to you; for a young man is beset by temptations in a place like London, and the more respectable people 'e knows the better. That's what I say."

"Just so, Mrs. Bell! Yes; my friends have been very kind to me, and I am sure you'll be glad to

hear that I've come into a bit of good luck at last."

"Well, I never! Have you now? That's just what the little gennelman said yesterday, that he'd good news for you. I 'ope it's money, Mr. Waverley. Money is heverythink to a young man just startin' in life."

"Yes; it is money."

"I am glad! A nice little sum too, I 'ope. Enough to set you goin' when you takes a wife."

"Quite enough and to spare. Though I never mean to be such a fool as to marry, Mrs. Bell."

"La! sir, you shouldn't speak in that way of holy matrimony. I can't abear to hear the young people nowadays a-ridicoolin' of marriage as if it 'twasn't nothin'. Why, when *I* was a gal, I'm sure the first thing we thinked of was an 'usband; and it was 'catch who catch can' amongst us, directly a young man made 'is appearance."

"Poor fellow!" said Vivian gravely, as he seated himself on the counter; "but I shouldn't have minded being caught by *you*, Mrs. Bell."

"Get along with your nonsense, sir! What I means is this: all the young folk seem set against nature nowadays. The men don't want to have wives, and when the gals is married they don't want to 'ave children. Why, it's regular flyin' in the face

of Providence. Look at my Bonnie, now. She might marry as nice a young man to-morrow as ever stepped, but she won't 'ave a word to say to 'im."

"Who's that? Kit Masters?"

"Yes, sir; he's regular in earnest arter 'er, but she slapped his poor face yesterday, so that you might 'ave 'eard it down at Whitechapel."

Vivian laughed.

"Oh, that means nothing, Mrs. Bell. When girls slap a man's face, they want to be kissed in return. Masters ought to have known that; he isn't half a sharp fellow."

"Pr'aps not, sir; but 'e's got the means to keep 'er well, and pervide for 'er arter I'm gone, and she's a fool to say 'nay' to 'im; but Bonnie was always a bit daft, you know, Mr. Waverley, and not like other gals."

"Where is she now, Mrs. Bell?"

"In your rooms, I think. Seems to me she spends 'alf 'er time a-dustin' of nothin'. She ain't good for much, I know; and Masters, or any other man that gets 'er, will 'ave a sorry bargain."

"I dare say Bonnie will come round after a little, Mrs. Bell; I'll talk to her, and see if I cannot persuade her to give Kit Masters a trial."

"Aye, do, Mr. Waverley! She thinks a deal of

111371B

you, Bonnie does, and of what you say, and will take your word afore mine, any day."

"All right; I'll try my best," replied Vivian, as he got off the counter and went upstairs.

Bonnie was sweeping the sitting-room, with a duster tied round her head to keep the dust from her hair. She looked very pretty in her homely head-dress, though she blushed scarlet at being discovered so attired, and tried hard to get rid of it.

"Don't pull it off, Bonnie!" exclaimed Vivian; "it looks uncommonly nice and tidy, I can tell you."

"But I can't go on sweepin' whilst you're here, Mr. Waverley."

"I don't want you to do so; I want you to come and help me turn out my old portmanteau and the other boxes."

"La, Mr. Waverley! whatever for? You're not going away again directly, are you?"

There was such visible disappointment in the droop of Bonnie's pretty mouth, as she put the question, that Vivian was quite touched. It had not entered into his calculations that his stroke of good fortune might prove to be a great loss to his humble friends.

"Why, what do you wish me to stay for, Bonnie? *I give a lot of trouble, you know, and make a ter-*

rible noise; the house must be ever so much quieter when I am away."

"I never complained of the trouble, sir," replied the girl, with downcast eyes.

"Come here, and sit by me, Bonnie, on the sofa. No; never mind the duster or the apron; I want to talk to you. I've lived in this house, on and off, for four years, and you've always been a kind little friend to me; and so I think you will be pleased to hear of my good fortune: I've had some money left me, Bonnie."

"'Ave you sir? that *is* good! Is it twenty pounds—or more?"

"It is more than twenty pounds, Bonnie, a great deal. It is enough to enable me to live comfortably, without doing any work. I need never run about the country again, from one theatre to another, as I have been used to do. I can leave the stage altogether, and settle down where I choose."

Bonnie's face grew radiant.

"Oh! I *am* glad, Mr. Waverley! I am truly glad to hear it. And now you need never spare yourself tobacco nor beer again, nor summat nice for your dinner, like a roast duck, or that. And oh, Mr. Waverley, sir! you'll 'ave curtains put up to the bed against winter, *won't* you, to keep out that draught

from the door that used to cut so when you 'ad the influenza?"

"And when a certain little girl was so kind as to hang up her best gown to shield me from the cold! I haven't forgotten that, Bonnie; and when I get my money you shall have the prettiest gown that is to be bought, in remembrance of your own goodness."

"La, sir! 'twas nothin'," replied Bonnie, with a shamed face. "I'd 'ave done the same for any one."

Vivian perceived that the girl imagined that, fortune or no fortune, he would continue to live on at the greengrocer's shop, and was wondering how to break the news to her of his certain departure.

"Well, then, as I'm not going to act again, you see, all my theatrical dresses will be of no further use to me, so I want to pack them up and send them to my friend Mr. Selwyn, who has just telegraphed to say he will take my engagement at Swansea. That is the gentleman who nursed me through the brain fever two years ago—you remember, Bonnie?—and my dresses and wigs will be valuable to him, though they are of no further use to me. Will you help me to sort them, and put them all away in the big black box?"

"*Willingly*, sir!" cried Bonnie. "And won't the

gentleman be pleased when 'e gets 'em. But you won't send away that lovely violet velvet coat, with the satin breeches, Mr. Waverley, will you?"

"Yes, everything! I never wish to look at them again," replied Vivian, as he tossed dresses, wigs, jewelled rapiers, and buckled shoes, one after the other, out of the chests of drawers, and Bonnie packed them for him in a travelling-trunk.

When the task was completed, he wrote a legible direction for the box:

"TO EVERARD SELWYN, ESQ.,
"Theatre Royal,
"Swansea,"

and told the girl it was to be fetched away by the railway-van that evening.

"I will write and tell Mr. Selwyn it is coming," he added. "Well, that's over, and it's a relief to my mind. Good-bye to the old days, and all the hard work, anxiety, and suspense that accompanied them! And now for the rest of my things, what am I to do with them?"

He intended to leave the greater part of his property with Mrs. Bell, to be disposed of as she thought fit, but he put the question in order to introduce the subject of his departure.

"Why, *what should you do with them?*" de-

manded Bonnie. "You're never going to throw away your shirts and pocket-handkerchiefs and socks, Mr. Waverley? What'll you do without 'em?"

"Buy new ones, Bonnie. These have seen good service."

"But they'll do to knock about of a morning, sir, if they're not good enough for you to go out in. 'Twould be ten thousand pities to throw 'em away."

"There's no need to do that. Your grandmother can sell them, or give them away, or do what she pleases with them. I shall only take a change of linen and the suit I wear with me."

"Take em *where?*" demanded Bonnie.

"To my friend's house or to the hotel. I think I shall go to an hotel for a day or two."

"To an hotel!" repeated the girl, vaguely; "but why, sir? When shall you be coming back to us again?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, Bonnie," replied Vivian, slowly, "I don't quite think, I shall come back—not to sleep you know. Of course I shall come and see you and your grandmother sometimes; but I shall live in bigger rooms than these now, and in a different part of London: and though I'm very sorry to leave you and Mrs. Bell, who have *always been* so kind and attentive to me, yet it

wouldn't suit my altered circumstances, you see, to keep on these little rooms."

"*Not come back!*" said Bonnie, with a half-frightened stare.

Vivian had watched the girl's colour ebb and flow as he spoke to her, and saw that the announcement he had made was anything but a pleasurable one, but he was scarcely prepared to meet the livid countenance she turned towards him now.

"Not to live here," he repeated kindly; "but I shall often see you, dear Bonnie, I hope."

He put his hand upon her shoulder as he spoke, but she shook it off as if it hurt her, and he saw that she was shivering violently.

"Bonnie! Bonnie! what is the matter? What have I said to make you like this?" he asked, as he bent over her.

"Oh, go your ways and don't mind me!" replied the girl, vehemently. "'T ain't nothin' along of what you've said. It's my poor head aches so terrible I can hardly bear myself."

And in illustration of the fact, Bonnie, throwing her apron over her head, burst into a storm of tears and rocked herself backwards and forwards. Vivian kept a small stock of wine in a buffet in his sitting-room. He unlocked it now, and pouring out a glass of sherry, *tried* to put it to the girl's lips. But

she pushed it from her, so that it was spilt upon the carpet. He waited for a few minutes till her agitation had somewhat subsided, and then asked her how she felt. He had not the slightest belief in the headache she had so suddenly conjured up, but considered it quite natural all the same that a pretty girl should cry at the idea of parting with him.

"Shall I call your grandmother, Bonnie?"

"No, no! let the old woman be. She'd send me off to bed at once, and then I couldn't help you with the packing. What more's to go, Mr. Waverley? The pain's easier now, and I can do all you want for you without no grandmothers."

"There's nothing more to pack, Bonnie. I have put what I require in my bag; and what I leave behind I wish you to do exactly as you think best with. But I should like you to take my books and pictures, and the little clock, and anything else about the rooms that belongs to me, and keep them for your own self, just in remembrance of the years we've passed together, will you?"

"I'll keep 'em for *you*, sir. P'r'aps some day you may want 'em back again, and then you'll find 'em safe, just as you left 'em in my care."

"Thank you, Bonnie, but I would rather you *considered them your own*. You will be married some

day, and have a nice little house, and they may help to make it pretty. I shall never want them again, my dear. I am richer than you think."

"Very, very rich?" she said, with a sob.

"Yes, very rich, compared to what I have been; and never likely to want any of the old things again."

"You'll be marryin' some grand lady," exclaimed Bonnie, with sudden energy.

"I don't think so, Bonnie. I've no wish to marry anybody yet awhile. But talking of marriage reminds me of something. What is your objection to Kit Masters?"

The girl's eyes blazed.

"Kit Masters! Who's bin coupling our names before you, Mr. Waverley?"

"Your grandmother told me that he had proposed to marry you, but that you refused to have anything to say to him."

"Yes! and allays will," rejoined Bonnie.

"But how is that? He is a very respectable, nice-looking young fellow, and well able to keep you. He's got a horse and cart, and he told me once that his father owned a market garden in Surrey. You might come to be quite a rich woman some day if you married him, Bonnie?"

"Aye! I *might* maybe, but I shan't all the same.

I hate 'im and all the rest of 'em, and I won't 'ave nothin' to say to 'em."

"But listen to me, Bonnie; I want to tell you something. You're a nice little girl, you know, and I should like to see you married. Your grandmother can't live for ever; and you're too pretty and too young to carry on the shop by yourself. So you ought to get a good husband; and from what I hear, I think Masters is likely to make you one."

"Aye! will he?" said the girl, indifferently.

"Mrs. Bell says he's very fond of you; and indeed he told me so himself. And what I mean to do for you is this: On the day you're married—I don't care to whom, so long as he's a good fellow—I shall give you the entire furniture for a four-roomed house—real good furniture, Bonnie; and the wedding-gown and bonnet beside; and the wedding-cake too, if you like—for I shall never forget the many months I've slept under this roof, nor the good honest people that have waited on me here."

"Oh! that's what you'll do for me, is it?" cried the girl, glaring with sudden passion as she sprang up from her seat and confronted Vivian; "then you may keep all your good intentions to yourself, Mr. Waverley, for I shan't never marry Kit Masters, or any of that lot. How do you think I could do it? *How do you think I could do it?*" she went on in a

piteous, faltering voice; "to bind myself to a nasty coarse ruffian like that, who can think o' nothin' but his 'orse and cart? Grandmother calls me 'daft;' but I must be dafter than I am now afore I ties myself down to serve Kit Masters all the days of my life."

Her vehemence took Vivian so completely by surprise, that he looked at her in perfect astonishment. Bonnie had always seemed such a quiet, soft-spoken, smiling little girl to him. He could never have credited her with the expression of so much feeling. And to call Kit Masters a coarse ruffian, too; a man in her own station of life, and rather above it. Why, what could the child be dreaming of? At the same time her reproaches had placed him in a totally false position, and he felt called upon to ask her pardon for having offended her.

"I am so sorry I spoke, Bonnie; I didn't mean to make you angry; but I will never mention marriage to you again, if you don't like it. I shan't be cheated out of giving you a present, though; for, married or single, you must have a smart gown to remember me by, as sure as my name's——"

He was going to add "Vivian Chasemore," but stopped short at the very utterance of the syllables. It struck him *suddenly*, he hardly knew why, that

he would rather be known in that little household by the old name only.

"What did you say, sir?" demanded Bonnie, curiosity getting the upper hand of her trouble.

"Nothing, Bonnie—it is of no consequence; but you must have the gown. And now I shall go downstairs and finish my talk with your grandmother."

The talk proved very satisfactory to Mrs. Bell, although she was sorry to hear she was to lose her lodger. But Mr. Waverley "be'aved 'isself like a real gentleman," as she told Kit Masters the next day, "and paid me two months' rent, which I 'ope 'e may be as lucky as he deserves to be."

"You was allays too good for a play-actor, sir," was her comment, as Vivian told her of his altered circumstances; "and I've said so, far and near, ever since I first saw ye. You've a look altogether above it, and I felt you was bemeaned. And so I wishes you all the possible good in this world, and 'opes you'll come to think higher of matrimony, and 'ave a good wife to yourself."

"Thank you, Mrs. Bell. When I *do* have a wife, I hope sincerely I *shall* have her to myself. And now that we've settled our little account, I'll just run upstairs and have one parting kiss from Bonnie before I set off on my travels."

He ran upstairs, but he could find Bonnie nowhere. He looked in each room on the upper landing without success. He could not hear the poor child sobbing her heart out amongst the pile of dusty papers in the cupboard, and reached the shop again disappointed.

"She isn't there, Mrs. Bell: but I shall be round again before long. So give her my love, and say, by hook or by crook, I must have that kiss next time we meet."

"La, Mr. Waverley! you was allays a one for your fun, sir," replied the greengrocer's widow, as Vivian Chasemore shook hands with her cordially, and left the scene of his humiliation, for as such he had already begun to regard it, far behind him. Mr. Farthingale had supplied him with ready money, and he turned into one of the most fashionable hotels and ordered his rooms and his dinner, as if he had never been accustomed to anything in lower style. Then he had an interview with his tailor and his bootmaker and outfitter, and, before night, was established in comfort, and with all the paraphernalia of a gentleman about him. As he sat in the smoking-room that evening, after dinner, content to watch the curling clouds he blew into the air, and ruminate upon his altered prospects, one circumstance alone puzzled him: *who had put Mr. Farthingale upon his*

track, or connected the name of Alfred Waverley with that of the missing Vivian Chasemore? He had forgotten, in the excitement of the discovery, to ask the lawyer that question, nor had his cousin Sir Arthur mooted it. He was sure none of his theatrical friends knew his real cognomen, or that, guessing it, they would have given it up without asking his consent. He became so curious on this subject that he visited Mr. Farthingale's office the first thing in the morning, to learn the truth; but, to his surprise, the lawyer was as ignorant as himself.

"We had been advertising your name and description in the papers for two months, Mr. Chasemore, without success, when, the day before I found you in Drury Lane, I received a dirty crumpled letter, badly written and without signature, informing me that if I inquired at a certain address I should hear news of a lodger who went by the name of Waverley, but answered to your description. We had offered fifty pounds' reward for any information leading to your discovery, and in this communication it was intimated that if Mr. Waverley proved to be Mr. Chasemore, the writer would apply in person for the reward, and produce a duplicate of the letter in proof of his identity. But he has not appeared yet."

"*He is sure to do so, I suppose?*" said Vivian.

"Sure, as that fifty pounds is not to be earned easily every day!"

"I am most curious to find out who it is."

"There will be no difficulty, Mr. Chasemore. Of course the money will not be paid until we have received direct proof of the justice of the claim, with the name and occupation of the applicant."

"Whoever can it be?" repeated Vivian, with puzzled brows.

CHAPTER VII.

"WE SHALL NEVER BE MORE THAN ACQUAINTANCES."

REGINA NETTLESHIP had invited Mrs. Runnymede to spend the afternoon with her, in her mamma's apartments, which was a more remarkable occurrence than may at first sight appear to be. For though Mrs. Runnymede had, by reason of many circumstances, been installed chief friend to Lady William, she was the detestation of her daughter. Regina was proud and cold, and smarted hourly under the many indignities which their poverty thrust upon them; but the worst of all to her was being forced to endure the company and familiarities and obligations of the lady alluded to. Mrs. Runnymede was not their equal in birth or position. She

was their superior only by the fact of having a longer purse and being lavish with her money, and Miss Nettleship hated to see their vases filled with the flowers she brought, and to know that when they went out together she paid for their luncheons and cabs, and lent small sums to her mother which were never returned.

Yet the buxom Mrs. Runnymede sat in the drawing-room that afternoon by her invitation, and Regina was doing her best to make herself agreeable to her. The fact is, it was the third day after the return of Vivian Chasemore to his family—the day on which Sir Arthur had avowed his intention of making another call upon her—and as the weather was showery, and Lady William was confined to her bedroom with a cold, Miss Nettleship had thought it as well to secure herself against an awkward *tête-à-tête* with the enamoured baronet. She had not told her mother of the terrible mistake she had made; of the predicament into which she had so nearly fallen; and which, had Mr. Farthingale's apposite appearance been delayed by ten minutes, might have seriously entangled her with Sir Arthur Chasemore.

She knew that the baronet considered she had as good as given her word to marry him; but Regina remembered with a sigh of relief that she had *not*

so given it, and that it only required a little womanly *finesse* on her part to be quit of her half-accomplished bargain. Still, she did not intend to dismiss Sir Arthur until she had seen what chances she might have with his rich cousin; she was not one to drop the bone for the shadow; and therefore she felt that, at all hazards, she must avoid being left alone with him to risk a repetition of the scene she had already gone through, until she had finally made up her mind on the subject. Whilst she was deliberating whether she should seclude herself for the day in Lady William's bedroom, or run the chance of a cold by walking out in the rain, Mrs. Runnymede had "dropped in" to luncheon, and Regina had made her promise to remain with her for the rest of the day. She even swallowed her disgust at seeing a *paté de foie gras* and a basket of flowers and fruit handed out of the cab that conveyed Mrs. Runnymede to their door (for that lady seldom visited them empty-handed), and praised the viands when they appeared upon the luncheon-table, although she felt as if each mouthful would choke her.

Mrs. Runnymede had evidently been handsome in her youth, with a bold, high-coloured beauty which had now degenerated into coarseness. She had large features and large limbs, and was altogether rather *oppressive* in a small room. She dyed

her hair of an auburn colour, and dropped belladonna into her eyes to make them appear still larger than they were by nature, and fancied herself so secure against detection on both points as to be able openly to remonstrate with Lady William for rouging the cheeks and blacking the eye-brows of her shaking palsied old head. Mrs. Runnymede always professed to have very weak sight and delicate nerves. The first thing she did on entering a room was to let down the blinds and sit as far away from the window as possible, shading her eyes with her hands. Some people thought it was the belladonna that made her eyes so bloodshot and watery-looking; others that it was occasioned by an extra glass of sherry: but Mrs. Runnymede herself said it was all the trouble she had gone through and the many tears she had shed, and presumably she knew the truth of the matter. She had one virtue to counteract her foibles: she was very good-natured, at least with those to whom it served her purpose to be so.

But Regina Nettleship would have suffered less under insults from Mrs. Runnymede's hand than she did under the presents it extended to her, and which, if she refused, her mother accepted instead.

As the two women sat opposite to each other in *the little drawing-room* they formed a striking con-

trast. Notwithstanding the summer shower, the temperature was exceedingly warm, and a deeper flush than usual had mounted to the elder lady's cheek. But scarcely any colour illumined Regina's marble face. She looked like an ice-maiden, with her purely-cut features, and the pale gold hair that was wound in a classical fashion about her head. Her dress—which, except for a little fall of lace about the throat and wrists, was perfectly plain—was only an old white alpaca which had been washed till it turned yellow; but its folds sat upon her lissom figure as if she had been a queen. There was a cold purity and dignity about all her movements, and her very way of speaking, that, from whatever source it was derived, struck every spectator who saw Regina Nettleship for the first time. As she moved slowly and gracefully about the ill-kept and ill-furnished apartment, she might have been Semiramis treading the marble courts of Nineveh, or Zenobia in the groves of Palmyra, or Cleopatra floating in her gilded barge on the bosom of the Nile. And Mrs. Runnymede, notwithstanding her self-appreciation, recognised the superiority of tone and manner in her young companion, and felt mean and common beside it.

“Have you not been out at all to-day, Miss Nettleship?” she demanded. (It was strange that,

for all her intimacy at Lady William's house, she had never yet arrived at calling Regina by her Christian name.)

"Yes; I went in Kensington Gardens this morning, but the wind rose so suddenly I was obliged to come home. I met with a curious adventure, too: quite matter for a novel," said Miss Nettleship, with a smile at the remembrance.

"What was that?"

"I was in the Broad Walk when a gust of wind suddenly caught me under the hat. The elastic broke, and off went my hat half-way to Bayswater! I didn't know what on earth to do—I couldn't run after it, you know, and there it was, scudding before the wind like a hoop. So I turned to a little boy and said, 'If you'll run after that hat and bring it back to me, I'll give you a penny.' The child stared at me like a fool, and I was just going to repeat my offer when a gentleman sprang up from a bench close at hand, and saying 'Permit me,' ran with all his might and main after my hat. You cannot think how ashamed I felt. Quite a crowd gathered round me, and made remarks upon it. I could have cried with vexation, and if there had been a cab within sight, I should have got into it and come home and left the hat behind me."

"Oh! that would have been very foolish, and

when the gentleman had offered to recover it for you."

"I could not endure to stand there with my bare head and all the *canaille* staring at me. However, there was no alternative, and it must have been more than ten minutes before I got my hat back again."

"What was he like?"

"The gentleman? Oh! he was young and good-looking, I think. But the chief thing is, that having restored my property to me, he walked off and left his own behind him."

"How was that?"

"He had deposited a small parcel on the bench when he gave chase to my hat, and after he had disappeared again, one of the children directed my attention to it. So I took it in charge; but after having walked about the Park for nearly an hour in search of him without success, I brought it home with me. And now I do not know what on earth to do with it."

"You must keep it till the owner claims it."

"But how shall I ever find him again? He doesn't know my name, and I don't know his. I left our address with the park-keeper in case he applies to him. If we hear nothing in a few days, I suppose we must advertise it."

"What sort of a parcel is it?"

"Here it is," said Regina, bringing a small, neatly-sealed packet from a side-table. "It feels hard, but I cannot imagine what it is."

Mrs. Runnymede pinched the parcel in every direction.

"I can tell you, my dear! It's jewellery."

"Oh, I hope not! I thought it felt like a box of Seidlitz powders."

"Not a bit of it. That's a morocco jewel-case. I know the feel of it perfectly. And it's wrapped in white paper too, and sealed. No one but chemists and jewellers use wax."

"What will the poor young man do? In his haste to oblige me, he cannot have entirely forgotten he had placed the parcel by his side. Ought we to send a notice to the police-station, or an advertisement to the newspapers?"

"I should wait a day or two, and see what happens. *He* will probably advertise for it himself, if the contents are valuable. What was he like?"

"You've asked me that question already," replied Miss Nettleship, coldly. "I don't look at everybody I may meet in the streets, Mrs. Runnymede."

"Of course not! But you might have observed

whether the preserver of your hat was handsome or ugly—a gentleman or a snob.”

“He was a gentleman—I know nothing more,” said Regina, as she deposited the white packet on the side-table again. She did know more. She had seen and observed that the stranger was unusually good-looking, and that he had cast more than one glance of admiration at herself. But she would have considered it lowering to discuss such topics with Mrs. Runnymede.

It was at this juncture that the servant announced Sir Arthur Chasemore, and the baronet entered the room, with visible disappointment at not finding Miss Nettleship alone.

After the usual greetings from the two ladies, and a polite inquiry after the health of Lady William, Sir Arthur resigned himself to his fate, and sank into a chair to be bored by Mrs. Runnymede.

“And now you must tell us all about your cousin, Sir Arthur,” she exclaimed fervently. “Everybody in London has heard the news of his return, and is dying to see him. The Stingoes are going to give a party on purpose to introduce him to their friends. And I hear he’s staying with those odious Farthingales. Is that the case?”

"He did stay with them for one night, Mrs. Runnymede, but he has now removed to his hotel."

"Oh, indeed! Much to the chagrin of Miss Selina, I dare say. It is easy to guess why old Farthingale was so anxious to invite Mr. Vivian Chasemore to his house."

"You forget," interposed Regina, loftily, "who the Farthingales are. I should hardly imagine that in their most excited moments they could seriously contemplate marrying into Sir Arthur's family."

Sir Arthur cast a glance of gratitude towards her.

"Hardly," he murmured, in a tone of acquiescence.

"I don't think there are any limits to their expectations," said Mrs. Runnymede. "Mr. Farthingale thinks his purse is long enough to accomplish anything."

"Which is only another proof of his own incompetency," remarked Regina. "Did you see your cousin the other evening, Sir Arthur?"

"Yes, I dined there! And yesterday I was with him at his hotel. He is very anxious for an introduction to you, Miss Nettleship, and I ventured to promise him one. Did I take too great a liberty?"

"*Certainly* not! Mamma and I wish to know him."

"He said he would meet me here this afternoon at about five o'clock, when I hope to have the pleasure of presenting him to you."

"Mr. Vivian Chasemore coming here to-day!" exclaimed Mrs. Runnymede. "Oh, that is delightful! Why, we are all longing to see him, Sir Arthur. He is quite the hero of the day, you know. Such a romantic history, and such a lot of money! Half the *salons* of London will be open to him."

"Yes! he is a lucky fellow, as far as wealth is concerned; and I trust we shall not find that the calling he was so unfortunately led to adopt, has deteriorated his manners for society. Is there no chance of my seeing Lady William to-day, Miss Nettleship?"

"Not the slightest, Sir Arthur. Mamma is in bed. She caught a cold coming home the other night from the Stingoos, I think, and has been poorly ever since."

"I am so grieved to hear it. I particularly wished to see her this afternoon."

"Can I give her any message from you?" said Regina, pertinaciously keeping her eyes turned away from those of the baronet.

"Yes; I should like to send her one—that is, if you would be so good as to deliver it," replied Sir

Arthur, as he glanced in a peculiar manner towards Mrs. Runnymede. That lady took the hint, and rising from her chair negligently, walked into the next room, which was divided from them by half-closed folding-doors, saying:

"Did I leave my hand-bag with my bonnet and shawl, Miss Nettleship?"

Regina would have rushed after her, under the pretence of affording her assistance, had not Sir Arthur laid a detaining hand upon her arm and drawn her towards the window.

"Forgive me," he said, "but I am longing to speak to you. Do send that woman with some message up to your mother."

But Regina drew herself backwards.

"Excuse me, Sir Arthur; I cannot favour one guest at the expense of another. Mrs. Runnymede is spending the day with me, on my own invitation."

"How unfortunate! I was in hopes you would have kept this afternoon for me. But I must look forward to better luck to-morrow."

He had taken her left hand in his as he spoke, and was trying to slip a ring upon the third finger. Regina snatched it forcibly away.

"Sir Arthur, what are you doing? Pray remember yourself."

"It is only a ring, Regina—a trumpery thing not worthy of your acceptance; but you will wear it, I trust, as a pledge of our engagement, until I can replace it with another."

"Oh no, indeed I cannot!" she whispered nervously.

"You cannot! and why?"

"Mamma would not like it. She is very particular, and she knows nothing yet of what took place the other day."

"But you will tell her, will you not?"

"I don't know. I am not sure."

"Regina, there is something beneath all this. Why do you speak to me in so strange a manner? Have you already regretted the promise you made to me the day before yesterday?"

"I never made any promise," she replied.

"The words you spoke then, and by which you led me to believe that your feelings were reciprocal to mine."

"Pray don't talk of it now, Sir Arthur! You mustn't hurry me so; you make me nervous, and then I don't know what I am saying."

"I have no wish to hurry you. You shall take your own time for all things. But meanwhile accept the ring, if it is only to keep in your pocket until you can wear it before the world."

"Please don't ask me! I would rather not."

"You are wounding me terribly!" replied the baronet, as he replaced the ring whence he had taken it. "I came here with such different anticipations from these."

"You forget how new the idea is to me. It is too serious a matter to be decided in a moment. I say so for your sake as well as my own."

"I thought you had decided; and therein lies my disappointment," said Sir Arthur. "I was so happy whilst I was buying that ring this morning. My cousin was with me, and asked my permission to buy a little souvenir for you on his own account. I thought, under the circumstances, there could be no objection to it; and I believe he made a very handsome purchase, which I suppose will be wasted, like my own."

"I can accept nothing from your cousin on the score of being engaged to you," replied Regina. "I am engaged to no one, Sir Arthur, whatever my preferences may be; and I do not intend to bind myself until I am quite sure it is for my own happiness and that of others. Mrs. Runnymede," she continued, raising her voice, "cannot you find your hand-bag? I think I saw the servant place it on the sofa."

At these words the other lady reappeared, and

Sir Arthur, seeing the interview was at an end, bit his lip with vexation, and stood with his back to Regina, looking out of the window. He did not believe her decision to be a final one by any manner of means; but he was annoyed to think his wishes had run ahead of hers, and she was more lukewarm on the subject of their engagement than himself. That she was really trying to get rid of him he had not the slightest idea.

"Here *is* Vivian!" he said, in rather a sullen tone, a few minutes afterwards, as a hansom cab dashed up to the door.

Mrs. Runnymede bridled with curiosity and expectation. Miss Nettleship said nothing; but even in that brief moment she found time to wonder to herself if the new-comer would prove more or less agreeable than his cousin, and if her charms would have any power to attract him.

How she wished she had been attired in a manner more worthy of her beauty! for Regina knew she was handsome, and rated each one of her personal possessions at its highest value. She gave the washed alpaca robe an impatient twitch as the thought passed through her mind.

"No more poverty for me," she said to herself, "if it is to be prevented either by fair means or foul."

Meanwhile Sir Arthur, who had gone to the

head of the stairs to receive his cousin, re-entered the room, with Vivian Chasemore in his train. He wished that something had prevented his coming. He had talked so confidently to him of being engaged to Miss Nettleship. And now he had only just had time in a hurried whisper to beg Vivian not to make any allusion to the relations supposed to be existing between himself and that young lady.

"All right!" replied his cousin. "Fancy! Arthur, I've lost that bracelet."

The baronet elevated his eyebrows, but could say nothing, for they were already in the room.

"Miss Nettleship, allow me to present Mr. Vivian Chasemore to you."

Regina rose in her stately manner, and was about to salute the stranger with one of her most graceful inclinations, when their eyes met.

"Oh!" she exclaimed faintly, as she stared at him; and Vivian's first words were:

"We have met before!"

"*Where?*" said Sir Arthur, in a tone of astonishment.

"In the Park this morning, when this young lady lost her hat, and I had the pleasure of restoring it to her."

"How very strange!" rejoined Regina. "Mrs. *Runnymede*, Mr. Chasemore is actually the gentle-

man I spoke to you about, who ran such a distance after my hat in Kensington Gardens to-day."

"This *is* a coincidence," said Mrs. Runnymede, as she bowed to Vivian. "I assure you I've heard the whole story, Mr. Chasemore. Miss Nettleship could talk of nothing else when we first met."

"Oh, and I've got the packet!" cried Regina. "You left it on the bench, and I looked for you everywhere afterwards without success, so I brought it home with me."

"It is very fortunate," replied Vivian. "It was rather an incumbrance in my pocket, and I laid it carelessly beside me whilst I sat down. Do you know I never even remembered its existence until I had returned to my hotel, and then I could not recall where I had seen it last. It was really most good of you to have taken the trouble to carry it home, Miss Nettleship!"

"I could hardly have done less, when it was the politeness with which you ran after my poor hat that had caused your loss. Had I heard nothing from the owner, I intended to advertise the packet. But little did I think that it belonged to Mr. Vivian Chasemore!"

They were so engrossed with each other, and with recalling the circumstances of their introduction, that they seemed altogether to have for-

gotten the existence of the baronet, who stood at a little distance, anything but pleased at being so completely left out of the matter. Regina looked quite animated too; and Vivian's handsome face was close to hers, as they talked of the gardens and the weather and the hat, and never mentioned his name at all. At last, however, the packet brought it on the *tapis*.

"Let me restore your property to you," said Miss Nettleship, as she lifted it from the side-table and placed it in Vivian's hand. "The seals are not broken, you see—Mrs. Runnymede and I have not been tampering with them, although our female curiosity sorely tempted us to do so."

Mrs. Runnymede was on the tiptoe of expectation to learn what the packet contained, when a message was delivered from Lady William desiring to see her in her bed-room, and she had no alternative but to leave the three young people together.

"Will you gratify your curiosity now, Miss Nettleship," said Vivian, extending the parcel towards her, "and break the seals for yourself?"

"Oh no! I could not think of doing so."

"But—if you will pardon my presumption and be gracious enough to back the assertion—it is your property and not mine."

Here Sir Arthur, guessing what his cousin was

about to say, tried hard, by winking and frowning and shaking his head, to prevent it; but Vivian, in his excitement and admiration of Regina, had entirely forgotten the caution given him upon the staircase, and went on unheedingly.

"I do not understand you, Mr. Chasemore," said Miss Nettleship.

"I mean, that when my cousin here, who I consider the luckiest fellow in creation, told me of the terms on which he stood with yourself, I asked his permission to present you with a trifling token of the friendship which I trust you may extend to me as his nearest relation. Do not think me too impertinent, then, Miss Nettleship, when I tell you that the packet you were so kind as to rescue from the bench, was intended for your acceptance, and that if you will open it and keep the contents, you will do me the greatest favour possible."

But the sight of Vivian Chasemore had been sufficient to make Regina Nettleship come to a decision respecting her future. She saw that he was ardent, impressionable, and admired her. She had read it in his eyes that morning: she saw it still more clearly now; and she was determined, even at the cost of losing the baronet, not to leave him under any false impressions regarding herself. So she put *the packet* from her—firmly and deliberately.

"I cannot accept any present from you, Mr. Chasemore, on such conditions."

"On what conditions, Miss Nettleship? I trust I have not offended you."

"Far from it, but you have been misled, and your generosity has been the sufferer. I am not on the terms you imagine with Sir Arthur Chasemore."

"Indeed! I am very sorry; it is a most stupid mistake of mine," stammered Vivian, who felt as awkward almost as his cousin.

"Never mind, Vivian," interposed the baronet, nettled into anger by Regina's coolness. "If the mistake has been on anybody's side, it has been on mine. I told you the truth, and you drew the inference for yourself. We both forgot one thing, however, and that is that ladies not only consider themselves privileged to change their minds, but avail themselves of the privilege as they feel inclined, without the least consideration for the feelings of others."

"I have never changed my mind with regard to you, Sir Arthur," said Regina Nettleship calmly, "and I hope Mr. Chasemore will take my word for it. I have never even made it up. But your present action has decided me. We shall never be *more than acquaintances for the future!*"

"Vivian, if you are ready I think we will take

our departure!" said the baronet, curtly; "Miss Nettleship will evidently be relieved by our absence."

"I cannot go until I have asked this lady's pardon for any unpleasantness of which *I* may have been the unfortunate cause," replied Vivian.

"There is no need, Mr. Chasemore, I can assure you. I have told your cousin nothing but what he should have known before, and I hope you will consider that my offer to him of friendship in the future extends also to yourself."

"I shall be but too proud to be numbered amongst Miss Nettleship's acquaintances."

"Mamma will be so sorry to have missed you," went on Regina, sweetly. "She will not be satisfied until she has seen you. I hope you will soon call again to be introduced to her."

"I shall be most happy!"

He shook the hand which she extended to him as he spoke; but Sir Arthur contented himself with a formal bow, as he hurried from her presence with a heart burning with rage and mortification. It was bitter to be rejected by Regina Nettleship; and doubly so to have received his dismissal in the presence of his newly-returned cousin.

CHAPTER VIII.

"HE MUST BE A GENEROUS YOUNG MAN."

THE two men got into a cab together, and the order was given to drive to the hotel where Vivian was staying.

"You'll dine with me to-day, old fellow, won't you?" he had said first to Sir Arthur. For he felt the slight to which his cousin had been subjected, and was desirous to set him as much at his ease as possible.

"Oh yes, if you like it," replied the baronet, carelessly—"as well there as anywhere;" and then he added something in a lower voice that was not complimentary to Miss Nettleship or her sex.

"Try and forget all about it," was Vivian's consoling rejoinder. "Women are riddles at the best. I don't wonder at our sometimes making mistakes about them, though I can sympathise with you on losing such a girl as that. She's like a statue. By Jove! Arthur," he went on suddenly. "I've left that unlucky bracelet behind me again."

"Have you? That's a pity! What shall you do about it?"

"Nothing! She's sure to mention it when we *meet*."

"Oh! you mean to keep up the acquaintance, then?"

"Why not? Miss Nettleship expressly invited me to do so. Didn't you hear her?"

"Yes; but, under the circumstances, I thought perhaps it might not be agreeable to you."

"Hang it all! my dear Arthur, I can't be expected to drop a pretty girl because she doesn't feel inclined to marry you. I hope you don't consider that such an act of prosaic virtue ought to come into the category of my cousinly duties."

"No! of course not; and I am sure you or any other man is welcome to her friendship. You'll never get anything more out of her. She's as cold as an icicle, and as proud as Juno."

"If she be not fair for me,
What care I how fair she be?"

laughed Vivian as the hansom cab drew up at the door of the hotel, and Sir Arthur and he disappeared within its portals.

Meanwhile Regina stood where they had left her, wondering if she had acted for the best; but quite sure that she could not have acted otherwise. A single admission of Sir Arthur's supposed claims would have been fatal to her. She was a little sorry for him. He was *certainly* very nice-looking, and

apparently fond of her; and if he had only had the money, she would not have hesitated to accept him. But what was his income?—positively nothing. A miserable, five thousand pounds, out at interest probably at five per cent., and the possible gains of a barren profession! Why, her mother had as much money as that, and yet how they were obliged to economise. Regina shuddered as she looked round the uncomfortable room she stood in, and thought of being condemned to stay in one like it all her life. Sir Arthur's title was something in the scale, certainly, and she wished—oh, so ardently!—that Vivian Chasemore had only inherited it instead; but it was an impossibility and no use thinking of. Vivian's really handsome face and figure she valued little. They added to his attractions, certainly, but without the money they would have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. But the next question was, whether Vivian Chasemore would consider her birth and beauty as an equivalent for his fifty thousand pounds? If his heart were only free, and not entangled with some low person in the profession he had left, Regina believed he would. She knew how to come down from her throne and be more of a woman and less of a statue, when the occasion demanded; and she knew also the effect she could *produce* by such a condescension.

As she pondered thus, her eye fell on the white sealed packet that had caused her so openly to speak her mind. In the hurry of departure Vivian had left it behind him. At first, the circumstance gave her annoyance, until she remembered that he must come back again to fetch it, or it would form a good excuse for her to recall him if he did not. So she took it in her hands and went up to her mother's bedroom. She had not told Lady William anything yet of her interviews with Sir Arthur Chase-more, but she thought the time had come to disclose them. She had refused him, as her mother had advised her to do, and she did not care who heard of it. The presence of Mrs. Runnymede only added a zest to her female love of communicating a piece of news.

The whole story was gone through, with the omission, of course, of such details as Regina considered disadvantageous to herself, and the two old ladies were delighted with it. Mrs. Runnymede put in a few expressions of compassion and sympathy for Sir Arthur in the disappointment he must have sustained; but Lady William's head shook with excitement and pleasure at hearing that her daughter had behaved so discreetly, and she reminded Mrs. Runnymede rather sharply that this was not the *first young man Regina had rejected in marriage,*

and it was not to be supposed that the granddaughter of the Duke of Mudford was going to throw herself away upon a beggarly baronet, without even sufficient money to keep up the title.

"And so Vivian Chasemore is good-looking, Runnymede tells me," continued Lady William, who, divested of her rouge and false hair, and clad in a flannel dressing-gown, was anything but good-looking herself. "He certainly has lost no time in calling upon us."

"Oh! that was in consequence of the presumption of Sir Arthur, mamma, who actually made so sure I intended to accept him, that he invited his cousin to come and offer his congratulations. And here is the packet Mr. Chasemore bought for my acceptance. He left it on the table by mistake."

"Perhaps it was not by mistake," suggested Mrs. Runnymede.

"It could hardly have been done intentionally, after what I said to him," replied Regina, in the unpleasantly sarcastic tone in which she usually addressed her mother's friend. "Mr. Vivian Chasemore did not look as if he relished the rebuff which his cousin received sufficiently to run the risk of encountering another on his own account."

"It is quite a weighty parcel," remarked Lady

William, as she balanced it in her hands. "I should like to see its contents."

"Nothing easier," suggested Mrs. Runnymede; "the paper is only sealed down with wax at the corners. I could open and do it up again so that no one could detect the difference."

"What do you say, Regina? I should like to have a peep, if only to form some idea of Mr. Vivian Chasemore's character. I think men's minds are so often to be read in their purchases."

"I see no harm in opening the packet, mamma, if it is carefully re-sealed. I shouldn't like Mr. Chasemore to think we had tampered with it."

"Of course not! We will take care of that. Hand me those scissors off the dressing table, Regina."

Regina gave Lady William what she asked for. She was not usually so complaisant, but she was curious herself to see what the packet contained.

Lady William took off the outer wrappings with the greatest care, when a morocco case was brought to view, which being opened, displayed a beautiful bracelet of chased gold, with a large star of pearls and diamonds in the centre.

The two elder women went into ecstasies over the jewelled toy.

"He *must* be a generous young man," exclaimed

Lady William, "to make such a purchase as this for his cousin's *fiancée*! Why, it must have cost fifty pounds, at the very least."

"Fifty pounds, my dear Lady William! Much more like one hundred, I can assure you. Those are whole pearls, and the diamonds are brilliants. It quite makes my mouth water!"

"And you should have seen the trumpery ring Sir Arthur wanted me to accept to-day, mamma," said Regina. "A schoolgirl's trinket, that I would not have been seen with on my finger."

"Ah, my dear, that young man has to be taught his place. Perhaps the lesson you have given him will be very useful. His cousin appears to be cast in a totally different mould."

"He does indeed," murmured Mrs. Runnymede. "Miss Nettleship, this bracelet is most artistic! Does it not make you feel quite miserable to have refused it?"

"Not when I remember the supposition on which it was bought for me. Pray do it up again very carefully, Mrs. Runnymede. I expect Mr. Chase-more will call here to-morrow or the next day."

The morocco case was returned to its paper wrappings, and the seals secured as before. Then *Mrs. Runnymede* suddenly remembered she could

not stay a minute later, as she had an engagement with Mrs. Macdougall for that very evening.

"I know the cause of that hasty departure," said Regina, as their friend turned her back upon them; "she wants to tell the whole story of Sir Arthur's rejection and Mr. Chasemore's bracelet to that other old scandal-monger, the Macdougall of Macdougall."

"Were you wise to say so much before her?"

"I really don't know, and I don't care! It is sure to get round to Selina Farthingale's ears by their means, and I should like her to know that I've refused Sir Arthur, because she is so very anxious to get him for herself. She may do it now, and welcome!"

"Ah! you see I was right, my dear," said Lady William, oracularly; "and I am thankful you have taken my advice. I tremble to think what might have happened if Mr. Chasemore's recovery had been delayed for a month or two. You might have been married to Sir Arthur before he arrived."

"I don't think so. But you mustn't make too sure of Vivian Chasemore, mamma. All we know is, that he is here. He may be engaged, or even married, for aught we have heard to the contrary."

But Lady William's faith was not to be shaken.

"No, my dear; no!" she answered. "A married

man—or even an engaged man—would not have brought that bracelet for a perfect stranger. He would have been thinking of his house and his furniture and his wife's dresses instead. Vivian Chasemore is too extravagant to be anything but a bachelor and heart-whole. When did he say he was coming again?"

"He mentioned no particular time. He only said he should have pleasure in doing so."

"You must write to him, Regina, in my name, and ask him to dine with us on Thursday. Farthingale will forward the letter, and Mèringue can send in the dinner. Something very simple, you know: a roast chicken and a little oyster soup. Young men who can get everything they want are never particular about their eating. Mr. Chasemore has not had time to make any friends in London, and the sooner we are in the field the better. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly, mamma! And shall I mention the bracelet?"

"Yes! say you will keep it safely for him till he comes. I dare say he will try and persuade you to retain it; but you must refuse the offer, at all risks."

"Of course I shall, mamma! Do you think I *should* be so foolish as to let him imagine I accept

presents from strangers? It will not even do to let him suppose such a gift would be of any value to me. By the way, that reminds me that I ought to have a new dress. I really have not a decent one to walk in the Park or anywhere. And if there is one thing above another that frightens rich men away, it is genteel poverty."

"Well, well, we will see about that after Thursday. I shall be better able to judge then what the young man's intentions are likely to be. Write that note, Regina, and send it by to-night's post. Lay it all on me! Say I knew his father when a boy, and am desirous to see him in consequence. And write in a friendly manner. When a man has no decent acquaintances, he is touched by a little cordiality from strangers."

So the note was written and sent, and Vivian Chasemore, "touched by the cordiality from strangers," accepted the invitation it contained with gratitude.

Meanwhile Mrs. Runnymede "dropped in" at the Macdougals' house in Hans Place, and was fortunate enough to find Selina Farthingale there. For this young lady was a great favourite with the old Scotchwoman, who had the power to introduce her into good society, and upon whom she fawned, when occasion demanded it, to a sickening extent. She was spending the evening with her now on

her own invitation, having left Miss Janet Oppenheim at home *sans cérémonie*, as her father advised her to do.

Every detail relating to the runaway hat and the lost packet; the refusal of the baronet and the purchase of the bracelet, was repeated again and again by Mrs. Runnymede for the benefit of her hearers, whilst the Macdougals' eyeballs protruded with curiosity, and Selina turned sick at heart at the intelligence of her rival's success.

"Are you *sure* he proposed to her?" demanded the Macdougals.

"Well, of course I have only her word for it."

"*Her waird!*" repeated the other, with a sneer; "why, my dear, that girl is hairdened enough to say *anything*. The way in which she went on with that young man the other night at the Stingoes' was a disgreece—a pairfect disgreece! All I can say is, that if she has refused him after it, she ought to be ashamed of herself."

"It would take a great deal to make Regina Nettleship that," rejoined Mrs. Runnymede; "she's as stuck-up and proud as she can be. You should have seen the air with which she told us the story. You would have thought Sir Arthur wasn't good enough for a door-mat for her."

"I don't believe he ever proposed to her at all,"

said Selina, who had great difficulty in keeping back her tears of vexation. "I'm sure she would have taken him if he had. They are as poor as church rats, papa says, and anybody can see how they dress. Do you suppose Miss Regina wouldn't be 'my lady' if she could?"

"Ah, my dear! but you forget the other young man has come in the way. She's got her eye fixed on *him* now! I wish you could have seen that bracelet! There's no mistake about *that*! It must have cost one hundred pounds at least!"

"A fool and his money are soon parted!" chimed in the Macdougals, to whose charge the fault of reckless extravagance could never have been laid. "I have nae doubt Miss Nettleship will take as many presents as Mr. Chasemore is silly enough to buy for her! There is something about that young woman that I never could stand."

"He'd better buy her some new dresses whilst he is about it," remarked Selina, spitefully; and then she went home, half-crying, to tell the news to her father, and was surprised and offended to find that he laughed at instead of commiserating her.

"One would think you had no feeling for your own flesh and blood, papa! And when you know how I've set my heart upon that man!"

"That's the very reason I am laughing, my dear.

You are too prejudiced to be able to judge in the matter. But this is the very best thing that could have happened for you."

"What do you mean? How can Sir Arthur being in love with Regina Nettleship forward my cause?"

"Tut, tut, tut! You girls think of nothing but love. A man may have a dozen reasons for proposing to a woman without having any love for her at all. He may admire her, or her family, or he may have been drawn into making her an offer before he knew what he was about."

"That's just it, papa, I believe," said Selina, eagerly; "she's a horrid flirt, you know, and she has led him on until he had no means of backing out of it with honour."

"All the better for you, Selina. A heart is often caught in the rebound. Sir Arthur's vanity has doubtless been wounded. It must be your part to apply the salve."

"But perhaps he won't come near us now!"

"Oh yes, he will! He has not many more friends at this end of London than his cousin. Until he came into his title he was always cooped up in chambers. We will invite him to some nice dinners, and make him thoroughly comfortable here, and *he'll* come as often as we ask him."

"Suppose he is really in love with her, papa."

"That won't make any difference! If he had reason to believe she would accept him, he will be all the readier to show her he is not mortally hurt by her refusal. But you must go to work very carefully, Selina. Don't frighten him. You women are much too quick sometimes. You leave the gentleman to me."

"What can you do, papa?"

"Never you mind! I can pay for the dinners, at all events, and all you have to do is to order them. And when I see he is in a proper mood for it, I can easily let him know that my daughter will not go penniless to her husband. Sir Arthur is seriously perplexed about money, Selina. He doesn't get on in the profession a bit. But if he were my son-in-law, I should be able to get him no end of work. Do you see?"

"But I want him to love me for myself," said Selina, who had really fixed her affections on the unconscious baronet.

"Phew! Nonsense! That's how you girls spoil sport! Of course he'll love you for yourself when the matter's settled, but a man's first consideration is the state of the coffer. A wife is an expensive article nowadays, Selina, and you'll go off all the sooner and *better because* your old dad has managed

to collect a few halfpence for you. By the way, that reminds me, how are you getting on with Janet Openheim?"

"Oh! very well, papa! She keeps her place and is not at all intrusive."

"You have not discovered how much she knows of her money matters?"

"I do not think she knows anything. She always alludes to herself as very poor. She picked up some old trimming I had thrown away yesterday, and washed it, and did it up again for her own use."

"That is well! and you must encourage the idea, for I'm afraid the old lady's affairs are in a bit of a muddle, and I can't afford to part with loose cash just now when I may want it at any time—eh! Selina?"

Miss Selina blushed and looked as modest as if the baronet had proposed to her that day instead of to Regina. The father and daughter were a well-matched pair, and she had great faith in his powers of generalship.

"I understand, papa, and I don't think Janet will be any trouble to us. I find her most useful. She is always ready to assist me in any way, and very clever with her needle."

"Well! I'm glad you agree. Women seldom do. It's lucky there's no man to come between you. *There'd be an end to your friendship then.*"

"I should think Janet Oppenheim would know her position better than to attempt to cross my path in any way," replied Selina, grandly; and then she added, descending to more mundane matters: "For what day shall I invite Sir Arthur first, papa?"

"Let me see! To-morrow I go to Guildford, and the next day I have to meet Raddles. Shall we say Thursday, Selina? Thursday will be as good a day as any, and give the man a little time to get over the unpleasantness he seems to have encountered to-day."

And so it came to pass that the two cousins were unwarily drawn into the net on the same day. Vivian to dine with Lady William Nettleship's daughter, and Sir Arthur with the daughter of Rufus Farthingale. Decoyed, it is true, and into the very jaws of danger, but it remains to be seen if either of them were caught.

Miss Janet Oppenheim went into her usual state of fervent enthusiasm when she was told that the baronet was to be their guest on Thursday.

"Oh! dear Miss Farthingale, how much I shall admire him! I feel it even before we meet. He will have no eyes for *me*, of course; but I shall sit like a quiet little mouse and watch all your happiness, and be so proud if you find time to tell him that you look upon me as your little friend."

Miss Oppenheim was not particularly small, but she always spoke of herself as though she were the tiniest thing in creation.

Selina promised that she would give an excellent character of her to their guest, and added in a condescending manner that she mustn't be frightened at Sir Arthur, who was really of a most gracious disposition, and sure to be well-disposed towards any one who was a friend of her father's and herself. On the Thursday in question, however, when Selina was momentarily expecting the advent of their visitor, she was rather startled at seeing Miss Oppenheim enter the room looking better than she had ever done before. A black velvet dress, made perfectly plain, but with a train that swept a yard on the ground behind, set off the girl's extreme fairness to its best advantage, and lent her figure a dignity which it had wanted hitherto.

"You need not have dressed up like that," observed Selina, sharply. "There is no one but Sir Arthur coming! It is not a dinner party."

"I know it, dear Miss Farthingale," was the meek rejoinder; "but I thought it was but respectful to any guest of yours, to appear as neatly attired as it is in my power to do."

Selina had no opportunity of answering again, as *at that moment* Sir Arthur entered the room.

Whilst about the same time Vivian Chasemore dashed up in a hansom to the door of Lady William's apartments.

CHAPTER IX.

"HE PROPOSED THIS EVENING."

You may be sure that Regina was ready to receive him, dressed in her best, or rather in her most becoming costume. For the taste of this young lady, although she was so poor, was very fastidious. It was not in her power to wear finery of the best description, and therefore she wore none at all. But she looked like a lily on its straight and slender stem in her plain black dress, just artfully cut away to display the moulded throat and rounded arms, and made without any trimming, except the soft lace that she had washed and quilled with her own hands. There had been quite a battle-royal between her mother and herself before she descended to the drawing-room that evening. Regina had entered Lady William's bedroom, and detected her in the act of anointing and powdering her face with even more lavish generosity than usual.

"Mamma," the girl exclaimed, "what an extraordinary delusion it is, on your part, to imagine that

you do all you can to advance my prospects in the matrimonial market!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Lady William, with the powder-puff suspended in its operations.

"Why, you say you want me to captivate Vivian Chasemore, and you are doing the very thing to drive him from us."

"I do not understand you, Regina."

"Do you think, mamma, that a man who has spent the last four years of his life upon the stage, and been in the nightly habit of seeing women painted and powdered to their eyes, is likely to appreciate such a very bad imitation of the professional process as you are about to give him?"

"Really, Regina, your language to me is unbearable," cried Lady William, who was most sensitive on the score of any allusion being made to her painting propensities, although she "made-up" so badly that an infant might have detected the imposture. "After all I have done for you—after the sacrifices I have made, and the inconveniences I have suffered for your sake, to be spoken to in this coarse manner is *too* much—quite, *quite* too much!" and Lady William stuck her powder-puff into her eye, under the mistake that it was her pocket-handkerchief, so overcome was she by the conduct of her daughter.

"Now, mamma! don't make a fuss about it! we all know you paint—who could help knowing it?—but I wish you'd do it with moderation for this one evening. If your object in asking Mr. Chasemore here is to secure him for a son-in-law, I feel quite sure he would prefer to see you as you are, than with any amount of rouge on."

"*Rouge!*" almost screamed Lady William. "You wicked, cruel girl! to mention such a thing to me, when you know the extent of what I use is a little violet powder to prevent the spraying of my skin!"

Regina did not know anything of the kind, but it was to her interest to pretend to do so.

"Of course, mamma! But don't put on even the violet powder to-night. I am sure Mr. Chasemore will prefer simplicity and ingenuousness to any amount of meretricious attraction. It will only be for a little while, you know. We can do as we like when matters are settled, and we see our way more plainly before us."

"*Meretricious!*" repeated her mother, as she rose and walked to the washing-stand. "That I should have lived to hear such a term applied to me by my own flesh and blood. Will *that* please you, Miss Nettleship?" she continued viciously, as she sponged every remnant of rouge and powder from her face with warm water and dried it carefully with the towel.

"Oh yes, mamma! You look ten times nicer now," replied Regina, complacently, as she regarded the reflection of her own fair neck and arms in the looking-glass. Poor Lady William's skin was like a wrinkled glove now that the creases were no longer filled with paste and powder, and yet it is doubtful if her daughter's words were not true.

Old age, however ugly, is always rendered worse by those artificial adornments which even the smoothest flesh can scarcely bear with impunity. Regina greatly preferred that her mother should appear like a yellow mummy to Vivian Chasemore, than with white and red cheeks. She was not afraid of any unfavourable comparisons being established between them, for she did not resemble her maternal parent in any degree, but took after her fair-haired, handsome, rollicking father, who had run through his constitution and his patrimony in the first few years of married life, and left his widow and child to drag through the world as best they might, on the small pittance which had formed his wife's settlement.

Regina may have been contented, therefore, but Lady William was anything but pleased. Her daughter was subjected to a very severe lecture on ingratitude and want of filial respect before she was permitted to descend to the drawing-room, and it was only the *opportune* arrival of Vivian Chasemore's cab that

enabled her to effect her escape. But she exhibited no traces of the warfare she had passed through as she welcomed him, calmly and gracefully, to her mother's dwelling. To Vivian, who had been thrown so much amongst a class inferior to his own, she appeared the very incarnation of good breeding and birth. It has been already said that this young man had never felt himself at home in the profession he had adopted for his support. He had been born for better things. Although he was headstrong, impulsive and passionate, he was not intended by nature for dissipation in any of its lower forms. Coarseness, ribaldry, and debauchery he revolted from, and intimate association with his inferiors, however good and kind they might be, had never had the power to please him. He could be grateful to them for their goodness—he often had been—yet he shrank from their intimate society.

Consequently, he had lived much alone, with leisure to nurse his own dreams of a future which he had never expected to see realised. He had been too young when he left his home to know much about women. Those whom he had seen since had not, as a rule, realised his conceptions of what the sex should be. There are women upon the stage at the present day who are ladies both by birth and education, but they are few and far

between, and keep much to themselves, jealously guarded by their mothers or their husbands. With such, Vivian had not had the good fortune to be associated; and the girls who had played upon the stage with him, and hung about the green-rooms, talking, laughing, and flirting with half-a-dozen different men every evening, had lowered, rather than raised, his ideal of womanhood. Indeed, at the moment that Mr. Farthingale had surprised him upon the first floor of Mrs. Bell's apartments, Vivian had begun to look upon the other sex not as inferior to his own, perhaps, but certainly as upon something that had been created to be petted and caressed when good, and taken to task when naughty, and never to be held accountable for the execution of any folly when left to its own devices.

Upon such a man, accustomed to the sound of bad grammar, and sometimes bad words—to the sight of false hair, painted lips, and flaunting finery, the appearance of Regina Nettleship had much the same effect as the pure cool dew of morning might have had after a night of bad gas, bad liquor, and dirty cards.

She looked so reticent and modest as she tendered him her hand. Her pale clear complexion had surely never known the use of rouge or powder; *indeed*, he doubted if she was even acquainted with

the name of those odious cosmetics. Regina knew them well enough, as we are aware, and had used them too, sometimes—just a *soupgçon* at the opera or at an evening party, to heighten the effect of her eyes—but she always did it so delicately that she defied detection, and had never admitted the fact even to her mamma.

Then, her dress was so neat and simple, without a single ribbon or flower; and her pale gold hair was so exquisitely arranged, like the classic heads of the Olympian goddesses. Vivian only saw the outside of Miss Nettleship, and he gave her credit for possessing all the good qualities which her exterior seemed to indicate. Even Lady William's palsied and forbidding countenance was powerless to detract from her daughter's charms. He saw how unlike they were, and felt no fear that Regina's old age should in anywise resemble her mother's. He passed what seemed a delightful evening with his new acquaintances. The dinner was very simple, but everything was well cooked, and no apology (that most certain sign of want of good breeding) was made for the poverty of the repast. A few flowers bloomed in a bowl in the centre of the table, and as they left it Regina took a damask rose and fastened it into the front of her dress. How it scented the atmosphere as it nestled amongst the

lace that encircled her throat, and fell and rose with the pulsations of her snowy bosom, as Vivian sat close by her after dinner and talked about his past life. Lady William had been wise enough to ask the Macdougals to join their party, for she foresaw that without some such aid Regina would be unable to say a word alone to Mr. Chasemore, and she trusted to her daughter's strategy too well not to know that, given the opportunity, she would make good use of it. The Macdougals, although one of Lady William's bitterest foes behind her back, was, after the fashion of female friends in this dear innocent city of London, only too ready to eat her dinners or suppers when she had nothing better in prospect.

So the old women retreated to the back drawing-room to talk such scandal as might seem good to them, whilst Vivian and Regina ensconced themselves in two low chairs at the open window in front, and looked through the lace curtains at the carriages and pedestrians still lingering in the Park.

"Sensible people," quoth Vivian, "to be bold enough to enjoy the best part of the day, instead of shutting themselves up in hot rooms or hotter theatres on such a warm night as this. Do you not think so, Miss Nettleship?"

"Oh yes! I perfectly agree with you," replied Regina. (No one cared less for nightingales and moonshine than she did, or loved crowded rooms and small talk more, but it would have been very bad generalship to say so.) "If I had a carriage," with a little laugh at the absurdity of the idea, "I should use it to drive away into the beautiful country, and see the fields and the flowers, and the dear little cottage children."

"You love the country, then?"

"Oh yes, I think so. I have never lived in it, you know," said Regina, with a sudden amendment, in case Mr. Chasemore had a decided aversion in that direction. "My grandpapa, Lord Mudford, has a beautiful estate in Gloucestershire. I believe it is a perfect paradise, but we have nothing to do with that, you see. Poor papa was only the sixth son. It was hardly to be supposed he could be rich."

"Indeed no! With your simple tastes, Miss Nettleship, I suppose it is useless to inquire if you care for the theatre?"

How she wished an angel would suddenly appear and reveal to her what he thought upon the subject himself. He would hardly have adopted the stage if he had not liked the profession, but at the same time he might have grown heartily sick of everything connected with it. She felt compelled, in

betting parlance, to "hedge"—and no one could do that more naturally than Regina Nettleship.

"It so entirely depends upon the actors, Mr. Chasemore, and the play."

"True; but you have all the best talent at your very doors in London."

"Yet we go so seldom that perhaps I have not had sufficient experience to be able to judge of my own feelings on the subject. Mamma is a great invalid, you know" (she could not possibly err in making a point of filial duty, Regina thought); "and of course I never leave her. But I have spent some very pleasant evenings at the theatre, with friends whom I liked. Everything depends so much on the people you are with, does it not?"

"Indeed it does. But I feel sure your intellect must respond to the expositions of some of the great actors and actresses we have upon the stage at present. To Irving, for instance, and Ellen Terry, and the Kendals and Bancrofts. I could name a dozen others, but I think the art of these very womanly women must appeal forcibly to their own sex."

"Oh yes. But is not the reason of that because they choose such sweet and innocent parts, and act them so naturally that they appear like nature? Which brings us back to my first conclusion, that *the best part of life must be that which is natural*

and good; and therefore the flowers and sunshine and the birds and children appeal to the highest senses which we possess."

Vivian was enchanted with this speech, although it did not entirely coincide with his own sentiments. He had never heard anything like it from the lips of a woman before and it expressed the very feelings that he associated with innocence and purity. How could he tell that in poor Bonnie's rough, untutored mind there existed higher and purer ideas than had ever entered (or ever would enter) into that of Regina Nettleship? He looked at the delicately-cut features, at the shapely outline. He listened to the softly-enunciated syllables—the perfect pronunciation, and he believed, without a single doubt, that the speaker's words were but a reflection of her soul. Is he the first man who has been entrapped by similar means to mistake coldness for purity, and self-command for want of guile?

He left the little house in Knightsbridge that evening, fully persuaded that Miss Nettleship was one of the most charming women he had ever met, and his cousin the unluckiest of men. Not that he was in the least surprised, now that he had talked familiarly with her, that she had rejected the idea of being Sir Arthur's wife with scorn. She was a thousand times too good for him: Arthur was not

intellectual. He had the most commonplace ideas on all subjects; and was it likely that a girl like Regina Nettleship, who lived in a beautiful world of her own, far above the sordid everyday lives of her mercenary fellow-creatures, should have stooped to assimilate herself with a man who thought of little else but his dinner and his clothes. She had hinted as much to Vivian in the most delicate manner in the world, as she placed the parcel containing the bracelet in his hands.

"This unlucky bracelet!" he had exclaimed on that occasion. "How I wish I had lost it altogether! It reminds me of the discomfiture of our first meeting. What a fool I must have looked in your eyes, Miss Nettleship!"

"Oh, pray don't say that! The mistake was unfortunate, I own; but I shall *never* forget the generosity which prompted you to please Sir Arthur by the purchase."

"He entirely misled me."

"He did indeed! And he entirely misled himself into the bargain."

"I suppose his wish was father to the thought," returned Vivian, with an upward glance; "and I do not wonder at it. Poor wretch! he has paid dearly for his presumption."

"Mr. Chasemore, I want you to believe that it

was presumption," said Regina, sweetly. "I should not have mentioned the subject, if you had not introduced it; but since you have, let me tell you that Sir Arthur had no reason to believe I should accept his offer. He thought doubtless that he was too good a match for a penniless girl to refuse; but he did not know that——"

"What is it that he did not know?" demanded Vivian, with interest.

"That I look for something higher in marriage than for a man to feed me and clothe me and keep a roof over my head. Sir Arthur is very good-looking and pleasant; but my husband (if I ever have one) must be my intellectual superior as well as my friend."

"That is just it," Vivian thought, as he strolled homewards to his hotel. "Arthur is not half good enough for a girl like that! She wants a man who is well-read and well-informed, and has sufficient brain to appreciate his own education. Arthur is wrapped up in his law-books, and is about as prosaic as a creature can well be. He has not the least atom of poetry in his composition. He would have wearied a girl with Miss Nettleship's tastes in a month."

And without exactly deciding that his own liking for *those subjects* on which his cousin fell

short would render him a more desirable companion in Regina's eyes, Mr. Vivian Chasemore was certainly better inclined towards himself and life in general, as he turned into bed that night, than he had been for some time previously.

He had not left Lady William and her daughter without receiving a cordial invitation from the elder lady to come and see them again. He reminded her so pleasantly, she averred, of his poor dear father, who had been a flame of hers in her maiden days; and that she had never seen General Chasemore during her lifetime, and that Vivian did not in the slightest degree resemble him, was not the least obstacle to the interchange of compliments between these two worldlings. Vivian was flattered by the interest shown in him by both ladies, and pleased to secure the opportunity of seeing more of the younger one. Her statuesque and passionless beauty had first attracted him; her reserved and apparently unapproachable manner drew him on still further, and the idea of succeeding where Sir Arthur had failed was no slight element in strengthening his wish to improve the acquaintance. How many of us, I wonder, value our victories solely on account of the honour we gain by them? How many would struggle to succeed, unless a crowd stood by to cheer the conqueror, and one

or two hearts were filled with bitter envy at our success? Vivian was no better and no worse than the rest of the world. He took a wicked pleasure in letting his cousin know, in a casual manner, how many times in the week he had been at Lady William's apartments, or accompanied the ladies in their afternoon drive in a hack brougham which was occasionally hired for their convenience.

"Oh, you are keeping up that acquaintance then!" Sir Arthur had once remarked with apparent indifference, though in reality with jealous heart-burning, as he listened to Vivian's account of an evening spent with Lady William and her daughter at the Italian Opera, although the latter forgot to add that he had presented the box for their acceptance.

"Yes! Why should I not?" replied his cousin, in much the same words as he had answered the same query on the day of Sir Arthur's rejection. "You are not such a dog in the manger, my dear fellow, surely, as to object to my knowing your friends because you happen to have dropped them! Why don't you go there yourself sometimes? I can assure you that Regina—I mean Miss Nettleship—bears you no enmity. She often asks after your health, and, if I remember rightly, on the day you

made that unfortunate little mistake, she said she hoped you would continue to be friends."

"Oh yes; I dare say! Be friends with a girl who misled me in so disgraceful a manner. I suppose she wants to whistle me back again, now that I am gone! But she should have taken the chance whilst it was in her power. I shall not visit there again in a hurry."

"It's your loss," replied Vivian coolly, although he felt very much inclined to give Sir Arthur a piece of his mind, on the subject. "But as for wishing to 'whistle you back,' that's all nonsense. Miss Nettleship refused your advances most decidedly, and in my presence. There is no getting out of that. Besides, it is rumoured all over town that you are paying your addresses to Miss Farthingale. Haven't you heard it?"

"Neither heard it, nor done it, nor mean to do it; so you may contradict the report whenever it reaches you. Selina Farthingale indeed! A beetle-browed old maid with a yellow skin! Thank you for the compliment, Vivian; but I hope I've got rather better taste than that."

"Oh, my dear fellow, I'm not answerable for the treason!" cried his cousin laughing. "I have thought old Farthingale's money-bags might have *some* attraction for you; and if they were in-

separably coupled with the beetle-browed daughter—the gilding to his black pill—*que voudriez-vous?* A man is sometimes left no choice in these matters. Still the bags would have to be filled to the very brim for me.”

“There is no truth whatever in the story,” repeated Sir Arthur, “though the money would be acceptable enough. But the lady is not to my taste.”

He might have added that the hopes he had entertained with regard to Regina Nettleship had rendered Miss Farthingale still more displeasing to him than she would otherwise have been. But some intuition made him hold his tongue. He had already begun to suspect that Vivian might end by taking the citadel which had refused to succumb to him. And the thought made him very bitter.

For one—two months Vivian Chasemore continued to come and go at Lady William Nettleship’s. He was acquainted by that time with numerous good families, and was a welcome guest at many houses. The Stingoes had opened their hospitable doors to him; Mrs. Macdougall of Macdougall had screwed him out more than one dinner; the Farthingales had *fêted* the rightful heir; and the smaller fry of Runnymedes and parasites of that kin had worshipped the ground he trod on. He

was member of two or three fashionable clubs; had a smart set of chambers and a *valet-de-chambre* in the Albany; and drove a pair of the handsomest chestnuts in town. The season ran on, with its wealth of dinners, suppers, balls, and card-parties; yet, though Vivian was overwhelmed with invitations of all sorts, and had scarcely a spare moment to call his own, very few afternoons passed without his finding the time to call at the little house in Knightsbridge, if it were only to leave a bouquet of flowers or a couple of stalls for the opera, or to inquire after the health of Lady William and her daughter. On several evenings he presented himself at their rooms, modestly though without invitation, to crave permission to seek refuge from the glare and the bustle of his outside life in the cool and the shade of the lace-curtained drawing-room. And those evenings were always spent close by Regina's side—sometimes *ête-à-ête* with her—discussing their mutual tastes, social and intellectual, and finding with each fresh interview how marvelously well their views agreed upon every topic of importance. All this familiar intercourse and interchange of thought had its due effect upon an impressionable young man of five-and-twenty, who was free to make his choice in marriage, and indulge it *as soon as* convenient. So that towards the close

of the London season, and just as Lady William was wondering whether it was not her duty as a mother to give Vivian Chasemore a lift over the barrier of uncertainty which stood between himself and her daughter, she was not in the least surprised, though very much gratified, to hear Regina say, as if it were the most unimportant thing in the world:

"It is all right, mamma! He proposed this evening, and we intend to be married the first week in September."

CHAPTER X.

"SETTLEMENTS."

REGINA had conveyed this piece of news to her mother's bedroom, whither Lady William had retired rather earlier than usual, leaving her daughter to make the last adieux to Mr. Vivian Chasemore under the romantic cover of the moonlighted balcony. She had never been effusive in her demonstrations of affection for Regina, but the knowledge that she stood on the threshold of becoming the possessor of fifty thousand pounds was too much for Lady William's maternal feelings.

"Oh, my precious child!" she exclaimed. "My

sweet, *sweet* girl! is it really the case? Of course I knew it must be coming; but to hear that you and dear Mr. Chasemore have arrived at an understanding at last, is indeed good news. And to be married in September, too; scarcely a month hence! And naturally he will make a handsome settlement upon you. It would be an unheard-of thing if he did not."

Regina stood by the dressing-table whilst her mother was pouring these congratulations upon her, with something very like a sneer upon her face. She loved money and the luxuries it procured for their own sake, but she despised the proffers of affection and friendship which she had known beforehand would spring up in every direction as soon as she obtained it.

"Do you think it likely, mamma, that as soon as the man asked me to be his wife, I sprang at him to ascertain what settlement he intended to make? Of course Mr. Chasemore will do all that is necessary or usual on such occasions; but I should be a fool to make him cry off his bargain by appearing too eager and grasping."

"Well, perhaps you are right, Regina. You are a very sensible girl, my dear, and a great credit to *your mother's* rearing. But now tell me all about

it: what he said, and how he looked, and the answer you gave him."

"He said very little, and he looked much the same as usual, and I answered 'Yes.'"

"Really, Regina, you are enough to provoke a saint! My only child, too, and when you must know how anxious I feel."

"Well, mamma! I suppose I must indulge your feminine curiosity. We were standing by the window together when the elastic that strings my jet bracelet broke—in fact, to tell you the truth, I broke it on purpose, to give him the opportunity to fasten it round my arm again. He's absurdly bashful."

"Yes—yes, dear! I quite understand! go on!" cried Lady William, eagerly.

"He picked up the beads, and I restrung them, and asked him to tie them on. He held my wrist in his hand for a moment, and said he wished he could see the bracelet he had bought for me on it. I replied that was quite impossible, and you would never allow me to accept so handsome a present from any gentleman—unless he were my *fiancé*. Then all the rest came easy, you know."

"Of course, but let me hear it, dear."

"How childish you are, mamma. A baby might guess what followed. He asked me if I would take

it from my *fiancé*—if I would take it from him! I replied, ‘But we are *not fiancés*, Mr. Chasemore;’ and he said, ‘Let us be so then, Regina—make me happy. Say you will be my wife.’ Then the usual ceremonies followed, you know. I let him ask me three or four times before I answered ‘Yes,’ and then he kissed me three or four times, and pestered me to name a day; so I fixed the 8th of September, which will give me nearly a month to get my things ready in, and he talked all kinds of nonsense, and then he went away. And that is the beginning and the end of the whole affair,” concluded Miss Nettle-ship, as she flung herself into a chair and yawned, as if it had wearied her.

It was quite evident that her heart was not the chief thing concerned in the engagement she had just entered into. How many hearts go up to the marriage-altar with those white satin-encased and lace-beshrouded figures? Not many, I fear, in this degraded age of barter, when the term of “holy matrimony” has become a mockery of the shameless open sales of bodies and souls that take place under the sanction of the Church.

“The 8th of September,” repeated Lady William, her matronly mind running on the chief business, in mothers’ eyes, of a wedding, namely, the trousseau. “*That is a very short time to get your things in—*

and, oh dear! wherever am I to find the money to buy them? I really think your grandfather might help us at a crisis like this. Do you think I could venture to write to him, Regina? It would be no use appealing to your uncle the marquis, he is so horribly stingy; but Lord Charles might give something towards your outfit. He married a rich stockbroker's daughter, you know, a woman with no end of money, and I do not suppose that he would feel the loss of a few hundred pounds."

"Mamma! I will not have you write to any one of them. They have always treated us shamefully, and I would rather be married in a print dress than owe a halfpenny to their bounty."

"It is all very well for you to say that, Regina, but how am I to get you a trousseau without help?"

"You must do as others do, I suppose. Get the things on credit, and pay off by degrees. You will be relieved of the expense of keeping me, remember."

"Yes, yes, Regina! You are very clever! of course that will be the way," acquiesced Lady William, suddenly remembering that when her daughter was once Mrs. Chasemore, it would not be difficult to get Vivian to help her to pay off debts incurred for his wife's clothes. "We must begin to see about

them to-morrow, my dear. A month is no time in which to get a trousseau ready, and Madame Hélène always keeps your dresses for so long! How astonished the Stingoes will be to hear the news, and the Farthingales too. I wonder if old Farthingale had any idea of getting him for Selina? If so, they will be terribly disappointed! Shall you write and announce your engagement to them, or trust to their hearing it by chance?"

"I don't care which I do; but we may as well let them hear it for themselves. I don't want them to think I am too eager in the matter, and Vivian is sure to tell his cousin, Sir Arthur, the first thing."

"Ah, my dear! what a pity it is that you couldn't have had both the title and the money! You ought to have been 'my lady,' Regina! I should have died the easier if I could have heard you called so."

"Well, it has never brought you much good, mamma, that I can see," was the young lady's reply, as she took her candlestick and walked off to bed.

She was mistaken in thinking that Sir Arthur was the first person to whom his cousin would communicate the stroke of good fortune that had befallen him. Vivian was more shy of telling his en-

gagement to Sir Arthur than to any one. He had already supplanted him in their grandfather's will—he had now won for himself the woman whom his cousin had desired to make his wife—and he felt for his double disappointment, and was proportionately delicate in forcing the truth upon his notice. But he took an early opportunity of imparting the news to the Farthingales, who were of course delighted to hear it, and heartily sincere in their congratulations. Selina had never entertained any hopes respecting Vivian Chasemore: had not wished to entertain any. Her heart—such as it was—was fixed upon the baronet, and the rival she had most dreaded was Regina Nettleship. To hear that she would so soon be safely disposed of was the best news in the world, and she flew at Sir Arthur with the intelligence on the very first occasion of their meeting.

“You must let me congratulate you, dear Sir Arthur—you must let us all congratulate you, on the very happy news of your cousin's engagement to Miss Nettleship. She is such a beautiful, elegant creature! they will make such a handsome couple. What a pity they should not have been married during the season. I expect half London would have been in the church only to look at them!”

Sir Arthur was staggered by this intelligence,

but he showed no further signs of emotion than were conveyed by his turning very pale and suddenly taking a seat. He had half feared that Vivian's constant visits to the Nettleships might end in a mutual understanding, but it was a great shock to him to hear it had come to pass so soon and unexpectedly.

"Are you sure your information is correct, Miss Farthingale?" he stammered. "I saw my cousin yesterday, and he never mentioned the circumstance to me."

"How very strange! His engagement must have turned his brain! Oh yes, it is certainly true, Sir Arthur, for Mr. Chasemore told us so himself; and I had a note from Regina this morning, in answer to one from me, in which she says she is to be married the second week in September. If you will excuse me for one moment I will show it you. I left it on my toilet cushion;" and away tripped Selina Farthingale, to give the unfortunate baronet time to recover himself.

She could not help seeing the effect the news had had upon him, and inwardly rejoiced to think that at least this must put an end to his folly, and leave the field open to herself.

Sir Arthur, left alone, rose from his chair, and *having* passed his handkerchief across his brow,

paced up and down the room three or four times in quick succession.

"Going to marry *him!*" he thought, as he did so—"going to marry *him!!* Curse them both! First, the money—now, the woman! He walks over the course in everything. And she too! false, black-hearted little jade! She threw me over for *him*, and nothing else. Had his return been delayed twelve hours longer, she would have been engaged to me. Yet where would have been the use? A woman who could go as far as she did, and then deny her own words, would have no hesitation in breaking an engagement, or a marriage either for the matter of that. May ill-fortune follow them both to the end of their days, and may my turn to laugh come yet! That is the best wish I shall have for Mr. and Mrs. Vivian Chasemore on their wedding-day."

He was interrupted in his reverie by the sound of a soft cough from one of the recesses near the windows, and turning suddenly encountered the modest figure and drooping glance of Miss Janet Oppenheim. The baronet grew red at the discovery. No one could have read his unspoken thoughts, but it must have been easy to connect his restless movements with the intelligence his hostess had communicated to him.

"Forgive me, Miss Oppenheim," he murmured; "I believed myself to be alone. But I need not conceal from you that I am rather annoyed that my cousin should have left the news of his intended marriage to be told me by a stranger."

"I think it was most inconsiderate of him, Sir Arthur—may I say, ungrateful! Miss Farthingale has only dropped a word before me here and there, but I have heard sufficient to appreciate the noble generosity with which you welcomed Mr. Chasemore to his home again, and the small sense he has exhibited of your forbearance."

His conduct had never yet struck the baronet in this light, but now that it was placed before him, he saw plainly what a sacrifice he had made on Vivian's behalf, and felt grateful to the person who had opened his eyes to his own beneficence.

"Indeed, Miss Oppenheim, you rate my conduct too highly. I have only done what I thought to be my duty. But my cousin might have prepared me for this. He has always insisted to me that he was not a marrying man, and although his intentions in this respect could have made no difference to me, one does not care to be taken by surprise in this humdrum jog-trot world."

"May not Mr. Chasemore have had some ulterior motives for keeping his engagement a secret?" de-

manded his fair companion, with the shortest possible glance from her feline eyes; "perhaps the young lady felt, as she ought to feel, too much ashamed of her choice to wish it made public sooner than was necessary."

"Is it possible you can have heard——" commenced the baronet, anxiously.

"That you once contemplated doing Miss Nettleship the honour of making her your wife, Sir Arthur," rejoined Miss Oppenheim, with a low silvery laugh. "Why, her folly was the talk of the town! Indeed, your great generosity in this, as in other things, is not unknown to your acquaintances, only we cannot add that it has been unrewarded."

"You think her unworthy, then?"

"Unworthy of *that!*" repeated Miss Oppenheim, with a world of emphasis upon the proposition. "Oh, Sir Arthur! you are strangely blind to your own merits and the shortcomings of others! However one may blame Miss Nettleship, one cannot but congratulate you!"

"I-dare say you are right," he said with a sigh; "I had almost arrived at the same conclusion myself. But I have been a very unfortunate man lately, and I think fate must be against me."

"I should have said you were one of the most favoured of mortals," replied Miss Oppenheim, al-

ways with the same air of self-depreciation; "but doubtless we argue on different premises."

"I do not understand your meaning."

"You think of what you have lost in others," said the young lady, "and I, of what others gain in you."

He was just considering what a sweet sympathising little creature she was, and whether he might venture to tell her so, when the door opened to re-admit Miss Farthingale.

"Here is Regina's note," she exclaimed; "so now you can read it, Sir Arthur, and convince yourself that my information was correct."

"I never had the least doubt of your word," he replied, as he glanced at the letter she handed him.

"There it is, plain enough, you see," she continued volubly. "They are to be married on the 8th of September and to pass the winter in Rome. I wonder what old Lady William will do without her daughter. She will be dull enough in lodging all by herself."

Sir Arthur returned the note without comment.

"You don't look over-pleased about it," said Selina, for she was jealous and angry at the manner in which he had taken the news, and could not resist letting him know that she had perceived it. "Don't you consider the match good enough for *Mr. Chasemore*?"

"Vivian has money and can afford to please himself, Miss Farthingale. I have nothing to do with his matrimonial affairs."

"Perhaps you are afraid Regina will not make him a good wife. She is a dreadful flirt, you know! I have heard her talked of myself, with at least half-a-dozen men this season."

"Then I trust, as she is so soon to be connected with me by marriage, Miss Farthingale, that you will contradict the reports whenever you may hear them," replied Sir Arthur, as he took up his hat and bowed himself gravely out of the room. Selina's coarse sympathy, which took the form of abuse of her rival, annoyed him. He had not seemed to mind Janet Oppenheim mentioning the subject of his rejection, but from the lips of Selina Farthingale he felt it would be unbearable. And he owed Vivian no less a grudge for the secrecy he had maintained towards him, that it had subjected him to hear the news from the lips of the lawyer's daughter.

When the cousins next met, it was very coldly, at all events on the baronet's side, and not many minutes had elapsed before the subject that was irritating him came to the surface.

"I should have thought that it was at least due

to me, as head of the family, to be the first informed of the change in your prospects, Vivian."

"Well, look here, old fellow," replied the other in his frank, easy manner: "if I had engaged myself to anybody else, it would have been different; but hang it all! you know, after what had passed between you and Regina, I *did* feel a little modes about it."

"Stuff and nonsense!" rejoined Sir Arthur. "I hope that you will, at all events, let that subject drop for the future. Granted that I liked and admired her, your own taste has endorsed mine; but beyond that, my dear Vivian, matters never went and you must take my word for it that I would have nothing altered from what it now is, for the world."

"You're a real good fellow!" exclaimed Vivian heartily; "and wherever I may be, there'll always be a knife and fork for you at my table, Arthur. Don't forget that! And now, when will you come round with me and see Regina again? I know she'll be pleased to shake hands with you; and we are to be married in ten days, you know. You will be my best man, won't you?"

"With pleasure! And as for the visit, I will pay that whenever it is convenient to yourself and Miss *Nettleship*."

"Let us say to-morrow, then, and I'll call for you at three. I can't offer to take you to-day, though I am just going there myself; for I have an appointment to meet old Farthingale about the settlements."

"*Settlements!*" repeated the baronet, opening his eyes.

"Well, not exactly that, old boy," returned Vivian, laughing. "You know it is not in my power to make settlements; but I wish Lady William and her daughter to understand thoroughly the provisions of my grandfather's will before the marriage takes place."

"Oh, exactly! You are perfectly right," said his cousin. "At three to-morrow, then. *Au revoir!*" With which he strode away, leaving Vivian to jump into his mail phaeton, and drive to his appointment with the lawyer.

It had come about in this wise: Lady William had so frequently made allusions to the present penniless condition of her daughter, and her happiness at the idea that she would now be amply provided for during her lifetime, that Vivian had thought it best that both she and Regina should be made acquainted with the conditions under which Sir Peregrine had bequeathed him the fifty thousand pounds. And these conditions being more fitted to

proceed from a lawyer's than a lover's lips, he had appointed Mr. Rufus Farthingale to meet him at Knightsbridge that afternoon, for the purposes of explanation.

His interview with his cousin had 'somewhat delayed him, and when he entered Lady William's drawing-room he found the little lawyer already closeted with the ladies.

"Here comes the hero of the day!" exclaimed Mr. Farthingale, facetiously, as Vivian appeared and saluted the company. "And now, as I am rather pressed for time, I will, with your ladyship's permission, at once proceed to business."

"Can't you spare us the legal details and tell us the plain truth—for once in your life," interposed Vivian. "I am sure neither Lady William nor Miss Nettleship will understand your technical terms."

"It is just as the ladies please, Mr. Chasemore."

"All *I* care for, Mr. Farthingale," said Lady William, "is to be assured that my dear child is entirely provided for."

She cared for much more than this. What she wanted to know was how many thousand pounds out of the fifty were to be settled exclusively upon Regina for her sole use and benefit, and Regina wanted to hear it too, although she looked so *supremely* indifferent to the whole proceedings.

"I do not think your ladyship need have any fears on that account," replied the lawyer; "but, as Mr. Chasemore has suggested, to read out this deed to you would only be to trouble you to listen to a great deal that would prove both uninteresting and puzzling. I had better, therefore, tell you the contents as briefly as possible. The late Sir Peregrine Chasemore left the sum of fifty thousand pounds to his grandson, Vivian Chasemore, under these conditions: the interest of the invested money to be exclusively for the benefit of Mr. Chasemore during his lifetime, and at his death to revert in equal portions to his sons and daughters."

"But supposing they don't have any?" cried Lady William, eagerly.

At this signal Regina retreated to the window of the back drawing-room, where she remained in silent contemplation of three empty flower-pots, the water-cistern, and a couple of cats fighting over an old bone; whilst Vivian walked away into the balcony, and amused himself with leaning over the railings and watching the stream of carriages wending their way into the Park. Lady William and the lawyer were consequently left together, and Mr. Farthingale could not help smiling to see the painful anxiety depicted on the lady's face.

"In that case, *Lady William*," he said, in answer

to her question, "the interest of ten thousand pounds is to be devoted to a dower for the lifetime of the widow, and then reverts with the remainder of the money to Sir Arthur Chasemore, or his heirs."

"Gracious heavens! Do you mean to tell me that Mr. Chasemore is tied hand and foot in such a manner that he is unable to make any settlement upon his widow?"

"Not if he dies without an heir! But that is rather an unlikely contingency to occur, my lady. And should he die, leaving heirs, the widow enjoys the whole income for her lifetime, after which it reverts to them. It is a perfectly fair arrangement, and the one most commonly agreed upon in such cases."

Lady William bit her lip and said nothing. She did not like to betray the disappointment she felt before the little lawyer whom she hated.

"Have you two people done talking?" cried Vivian, gaily, as he peeped into the room. "Has Mr. Farthingale explained everything to your entire satisfaction, Lady William?"

"Oh, perfectly, Mr. Chasemore. Nothing could be plainer nor more satisfactory," replied his future mother-in-law. But the minute she found herself alone with Regina, she told a very different tale.

"You've let yourself in for a nice bargain!" she

said spitefully. "That money is tied up in every possible way. If the man dies, there is positively nothing for you—unless you have a family."

"Well, I shall have a family, I suppose—everybody does!" rejoined her daughter. "And I shall be much obliged if you will drop the subject, mamma."

"Oh, of course; that is all the thanks I get for looking after your affairs, miss! I'm sure I shall be heartily glad when I've washed my hands of you altogether."

"You cannot possibly be more glad than I shall be," were the last words Regina said, as they parted for the night.

CHAPTER XI.

"I WISHES I WAS DEAD, I DO."

MISS NETTLESHIP was not quite so indifferent to her matrimonial prospects as she would have led us to believe. She took a keen pleasure in (metaphorically speaking) leading Vivian Chasemore about with a blue ribbon round his neck; but she occasionally felt a tinge of fear as she thought of the possible contingency of being left a widow without a jointure worth speaking of. Vivian, in

the ardour of his passion, had proposed that, in order to avert so terrible a calamity, they should not live up to their income, at all events until they had laid by a certain number of thousand pounds to form a settlement for herself. But Regina did not relish this idea at all. She had not sold herself in order to retrench and live quietly. She wished to cut a dash amongst her friends and acquaintances, and fill the breasts of both men and women with envy. She told Vivian that she would not hear of his laying by anything on her account; that if he spoke of or hinted at the probabilities of his death he made her miserable, and the pretty speech sounded so much like the outpourings of affection that the lover felt perfectly satisfied. So the preparations for the wedding went on gaily; a handsome house was taken for the reception of the bride and bridegroom; and in the midst of choosing expensive furniture and equipages and jewellery, if Regina ever experienced a misgiving as to her future, she put it from her as a disagreeable possibility that might never happen, and had better not be thought about. She had a great deal to endure at this time from the jealousy of her mother. It may seem an extraordinary thing that a woman could ever be jealous of the good fortune of her *child*; but selfish people are selfish all the world

over, and Lady William's equanimity of temper was not always proof against seeing the beautiful presents that Vivian showered upon her daughter, or hearing of the luxuries by which she was to be surrounded in her new house: whilst the poor old woman, too, hardly knew where she should find the money to pay for those articles for Regina which she could not procure on credit.

"Another dress!" she exclaimed with uplifted hands; "why, that makes the tenth! What you are to do with them all I can't imagine; or what you will find to spend your allowance upon after you are married. One would think you were going to be a duchess, Regina, at the very least."

"Really, mamma," the girl answered, "you seem to consider that anything would be good enough for me! I wish you would remember I am about to relieve you of the burden of supporting me for ever. Ten dresses! Why, I ought to have twenty at the very least; and if this is the effect of being a duke's granddaughter, all I can say is, that I am thankful, for the sake of my posterity, that I am *not* going to become a duchess!"

"Oh, of course! run down your father's birth as usual, Regina! He may not have left a fortune behind him——"

"No, that he certainly 'did not," interposed her daughter, decidedly.

"To be inherited by some scapegrace of a strolling actor," continued Lady William, with withering scorn; "but he had blue blood in his veins such as will never run through those of your children—if you have any!"

"I suppose not, mamma, unless they inherit a drop or two from me! Still I think, on the whole, I prefer red blood and rubies to blue blood and bread and cheese! My taste may be degenerated—I dare say it is—but I have been accustomed so long to the latter luxury, that I am a little tired of it, and shall enjoy a change!"

"Whilst you leave your poor mother alone to end her days in the same cheerless poverty," said Lady William, weeping.

Regina did not reply directly to this insinuation, nor deny the truth of it. Had her mother been an ordinary individual, she would probably have comforted her by the assurance that she would live more in her house than in her own. But the girl knew what such a proceeding would entail, and carefully avoided it. Visions of Mrs. Runnymede and the Macdougals, with cards late at night and sips of brandy and water, rose up to strengthen the *resolution* that her future home should be kept free,

as far as lay in her power, from all that had disgusted her in the present. So she deftly turned the subject.

"Don't let us think of anything disagreeable, mamma! You have had your day, you know, and surely it is time for mine to begin. Are you not going to put on your bonnet? Mr. Chasemore is to call for us at twelve in the new carriage, that I may see if I like it; and I believe we are to go to Howell and James's to choose some rings. Pray don't let him see that you have been crying! He will suspect we have been having words, and he thinks there is nothing so vulgar as a quarrel."

"Ah, well, my dear! I suppose I must go, since you must have a chaperon; but it seems folly in me to accustom myself to that without which I must manage to exist for the remainder of my life."

"I should think there was all the more reason to enjoy it whilst you can, mamma," replied her daughter; "but if you like it better, I will tell Mr. Chasemore to send for a cab."

"Unfeeling—ungenerous—ungrateful!" burst like pistol-shots from Lady William's lips, as she disappeared into her bedroom.

To Regina, however, who had never had more than a few shillings at a time to spend on her own pleasure, the reckless profusion with which Vivian

threw away his money was a source of exquisite content. Not that she was vulgarly and openly grateful. She accepted all his gifts as if they were her due, and nothing better than she had been accustomed to; but she revelled in their possession in private, and her inward satisfaction made her temper unusually sunny and beaming. Vivian thought her a perfect angel in those brief days of courtship, and indeed she was more like one than she had ever been before.

She even appeared to grow benevolent and charitable; a phase of softness of which no one had ever suspected her. When Vivian Chasemore saw her stop for a moment to drop a coin into the hand of some faded-looking woman sitting on a doorstep with an infant at her breast, or throw pennies to the little urchins that gathered round them in the Park, he thought what a good mother she would make, and thanked Heaven prematurely.

As they drove away that morning, in the splendid chariot drawn by a couple of high-stepping bays that he had brought round to receive the meed of her approval, a girl with a dirty face thrust a bunch of lavender in at the carriage-door.

"Go away!" said Vivian, sharply, and he was about to draw up the glass.

"Oh, poor child! don't speak so crossly to her,"

exclaimed Regina, as she threw a shilling to the lavender girl. It was one of her last, but she knew it would bear fruit a hundred-fold.

Vivian drew up the window gently, and clasped her hand.

"You would make all the world as happy as yourself, Regina, if you could!" he said fondly.

"Of course. But that poor creature looked so ill. I am sure a meal will do her good."

"You are so kind-hearted," continued Vivian, "that I have no hesitation in asking your sympathy for a little girl I know—a good little soul, though in the lower classes—the granddaughter, in fact, of my old landlady Mrs. Bell.

"Yes. Is she ill?"

"I hope not! She was blooming enough when I saw her last. Poor little Bonnie! But they were very good to me, both grandmother and granddaughter, at a time when I valued the kindness of even such humble friends, and I am afraid I have been very ungrateful. Fancy, I have never been near the house since I left it! I saw you, you witch, and you entrapped me at once, and I have had no eyes nor ears for any one since. I wonder what they think of my defection."

"They could hardly expect you to find time to

visit them amidst all the engagements of a London season."

"Oh, they know nothing of the multifarious duties of a season! They are as innocent as if they had lived all their lives in the country instead of Drury Lane."

"I hope you don't want me to go to Drury Lany, Vivian! Mamma is so afraid of those sorts of places."

"My darling! as if I would let you. No! what I thought was that I should like to give my old friends a present when I marry, and that it would come more gracefully from you than from me. A black silk dress for the old lady, and anything you think a young woman in that station of life would like best, for Bonnie. You could choose them so much better than I could, and I would send it to them in your name."

"Certainly, if you wish it. But would not that come better after the 8th of September than before?"

"I think you are right, as you always are. But in that case you must bear it in mind yourself, for I shall have time to think of nothing but you."

By which means it fell out that neither Bonnie nor Mrs. Bell ever saw the presents which it was *settled* Mrs. Vivian Chasemore was to select for them

When they reached Howell and James's, it was with difficulty Lady William could be persuaded to leave the carriage. Although she had been grumbling to herself all the while, because the easy springs she sat on and the rich brocaded silk cushions she leant against were not to be hers, but her daughter's, she liked them so well that she would have much preferred sitting there, "making believe," as the children say, that she was enjoying her own property, to looking at cases of diamond and ruby and emerald rings. However, Regina was inexorable in her demands that her chaperon should accompany her inside the jeweller's establishment, and Lady William was compelled to obey. The choice took a long time. Each drawer of glittering rings looked more tempting than the last, and the settings were so varied and so beautiful. At last Vivian, glancing at his watch, remembered a pressing engagement at his club, which would only, however, detain him a few moments. So, asking permission of the ladies to leave them to make the final decision and to call for him on their way home, he quitted the shop and drove to Pall Mall, sending back the carriage immediately for them. Even then they were not quite ready, for Regina kept trying on, first a half-hoop and then a cluster of diamonds on her little *finger*, quite unable to order which

should be sent to her address. At last, however, the decision was arrived at, and they rose to follow Vivian.

As they stood at the door, waiting for the carriage to draw up, Regina noticed a girl leaning in a drooping attitude against the iron palings. She did not look ill, nor very poor. Her stuff dress was good and new, and her little straw hat was neatly trimmed. But her large blue eyes were cast upwards with so sad and despairing an expression that it arrested Miss Nettleship's attention, even though there was no one by before whom it was her interest to appear humane and charitable.

"Are you ill?" she inquired of the girl.

The blue eyes glanced for a moment wonderingly at her fashionable dress and golden-crowned head (for Regina, although so poor, was always attired in the latest mode), and then drooped wearily again.

"No, ma'am!" with a sad little shake of the head.

"What is the matter with you, then?"

"Nothing! nothing! I thought I saw a friend but he is gone! Indeed it is nothing."

"Is she mad?" whispered Miss Nettleship in an awestruck tone to the shopman, who had bowed *them* to the door.

"Oh no, madam! There are plenty like her about. We are pestered with them every moment. Come now," he continued in a loud tone to the girl, "move away from here, will you, or I shall send for the police!"

"Don't be harsh to her!" said Regina, with feminine pity. Did some prevision of the dark future flash through her mind at that moment, and make her experience a womanly compassion for the poor soul who should suffer through her guilt? Who can tell? But she almost felt as if she would like to touch the stranger's hand. "Here is something to help you," she added, as she put money in the girl's listless palm.

Bonnie—for it was indeed Bonnie who stood there to rest and think—gazed at the silver for an instant inquiringly, and then replaced it in Regina's hand.

"No, thank you, ma'am!" she said quietly; "I've got plenty of money at home."

"Come away! come away!" whispered Lady William, as she clutched her daughter's arm. "How can you stand there talking to that creature? Can't you see she's drunk! Really, Regina," she continued, as they re-entered the carriage and drove to Pall Mall, "you have no sense of your own position."

The idea of stopping to talk to people in the open street! What can the footman think of you?"

"It is very little consequence to me what he thinks, mamma. He will be my servant in another week, and will have to think as I do!"

"But the woman was intoxicated!"

"She was no such thing!"

"The idea of contradicting your mother upon such a subject! What can you know of it?"

"You have given me plenty of experience, mamma, with Mrs. Runnymede and other of your friends. If I do not know a tipsy woman from a sober one by this time, it is not from the want of being able to compare them."

At which cruel statement Lady William relapsed into indignant reproaches, which continued until Vivian ran smiling down the steps of his club to join them again.

Meanwhile Mrs. Bell was jogging from one little shop to another, asking all her neighbours if they had happened to set eyes on Bonnie.

"On Bonnie?" exclaimed Mrs. Bull, the wife of the butcher at the corner. "Lor', bless my soul, Mrs. Bell, ma'am, you don't mean to tell me as you lets that gal go trapesing anywheres without your knowledge?"

"No, indeed, Mrs. Bull! I know my duty to the

child better than that comes to, but Bonnie has been very queer and unsettled lately, and I can't make 'er out. She's so undependable like. If I send 'er of an errant, off she is, like a shot, and don't come back for hours. And 'tain't to be expected, Mrs. Bull, as I can run of errants myself, at my time of life, nor keep a servant to run 'em for me."

"Maybe the gal's sickenin' for summat. Both Joe Mason's children lie dead of the diphtery, and they tell me as scarlet-fever is broken out the next street."

"Oh no, it ain't that! Bonnie's bin allays peculiar in the head; and as for fevers, why we lives in the midst of 'em here!"

"Aye, that we do!" acquiesced Mrs. Bull; "and nasty fevers they air too—allays taking off the wrong people. Didn't I lose my two blessed boys the year afore last with the typhoid, and there's that brute Bull as 'earty as the day's long!"

"Just so, Mrs. Bull; though (if I must speak the truth) those boys of your'n were no loss to the street, whatever they may have been to you. However, that's got nothing to do with my gal, who's not bin home this mornin' since eleven o'clock."

"Why on hearth don't you marry 'er hoff, Mrs. Bell? I expect there's many a young feller would

take her, for she's a personable-lookin' gal enuff, when her 'air's straight."

"That's just it, Mrs. Bull. Bonnie goes agen me in everythink. Kit Masters would marry her to-morrer, but she won't 'ave a word to say to 'im."

"And Masters must be doin' finely, too."

"Aye, that he is!—and just come into a fortune of fifty pounds into the bargain!"

"You don't say so, Mrs. Bell! 'Ow's that?"

"I can't say—somebody leave it 'im, I suppose; 'e didn't tell me, but 'e's got it sure enuff. And it might be all Bonnie's for the askin'!"

"Lor', the gal *must* be a fool! A young feller like that didn't ought to 'ave to hask twice. But ain't that Bonnie's hat comin' down the street now?"

"To be sure! there's my lady a-comin' 'ome at two o'clock, and bin gone since eleven—and not a thing done in the 'ouse! It's enuff to break one's 'eart! But I'll be even with her, never fear. Good-day to you, Mrs. Bull."

"Good-day, Mrs. Bell, ma'am; and 'opin' you'll manage to bring that gal to 'er senses."

Having finished her interesting conversation, Mrs. Bell walked slowly to her own house, which she reached just as Bonnie had hung up her hat and shawl upon a peg, and seated herself behind the *counter*.

"Oh! so you're 'ome again, miss, are ye?" commenced her grandmother angrily. "And where may you 'ave bin for the last three hours?—answer me that."

"Don't bother me, grandmother," replied the girl, wearily.

"Don't bother ye? you independent gad-about! Do you think you can leave a respectable house at all times, and come and go as you choose. You can't then, and I'll have no more of it. Now, where have you bin?"

"I've bin after no harm."

"I don't know that! respectable gals don't trape about the streets all by themselves. Who 'ave you bin a-seein' of, or a-talkin' to?"

"No one—at least, a lady spoke to me, but I suppose that won't kill me."

"A lady! What did she say?"

"She asked me if I was ill."

"In course! No real lady would think but what a gal was ill as lounged about all day doing nothink. Now, Bonnie, you listen to me. I won't have no more of it. You don't leave the house agen after this day unless I goes along of ye."

"Oh, I must get out and have a bit of fresh air!" exclaimed the girl, impatiently. "I can't bide in this hot street all day. It makes me sick, with

the smells and the dirt and the noise. If ye don't let me run out for a breath when I feels the want of it, I'll run straight off, and never come back to you. So now you know my mind, grandmother."

Old Mrs. Bell stood aghast. She had always known Bonnie to be what she called "peculiar," but she had never yet heard her give vent to such an expression of rebellion as this. She had been an indolent, dreaming, forgetful sort of girl all her life; but this was the first time she had actually refused to obey her grandmother, or hinted that there was a possibility of their lots being divided.

"Well, of all the ungrateful, wicked, scheming 'ussies I ever see," cried Mrs. Bell, "you're the very wust! Don't you know as I brought you up from a hinfant, to be what you are; and not content with wearin' out my life with your lazy, do-nothin' ways, you must go and perpose to leave me altogether. Oh, I'm glad my poor Joe never lived to see this day! He was a good lad, he was, who loved 'is poor mother, and would have slapped your face afore 'e'd 'ave let you speak to me in this manner. But you never was a bit like him in body or soul—more's the pity—and I only hope he ain't bin a-hearin' in heaven the words as you've just said to me."

"Why can't you leave me alone, then?" ex-

claimed Bonnie, in her turn. "All I ask for is peace and quiet, and not to have that horrid feller Kit Masters thrust down my throat every minnit. It's enuff to make a gal run away to be asked to marry a low creature like that!"

"A low creature, indeed! That's your manners, is it? Why, he's just come into a fortin of fifty pounds in gold!"

"What's that to me? I don't want him nor his fifty pounds. I dare say he stole 'em. All I want is to have a walk now and again; and one would think that walkin' was a crime, by the way you goes on at me about it."

"No, Bonnie! walkin' ain't a crime," replied Mrs. Bell, solemnly; "but leavin' the house and the shop to be minded by your poor grandmother at her time of life, when you know what the stairs is to her, is a crime and a grievance; and what's more, I won't stand it."

"I'm sure I've always dusted and cleaned the rooms as they should be," rejoined Bonnie. "You've often said as I spent too much time on 'em."

"Yes, on the hupper rooms; but they're not the kitchen-floor nor yet the shop. When Mr. Waverley was here, you was allays at 'ome, doin' this, that, or t'other: but now that we've got no lodger, you seems to me as restless as a cat in a strange place, and

as if you could never settle to a thing. And now whatever are you a-cryin' for?"

For Bonnie had laid her head down upon the counter and burst into a violent flood of tears which prevented her for some minutes from answering her grandmother's question.

"Well, I do feel unsettled and ill into the barg'in and that's the truth. I suppose it's this hot weather and never havin' any change."

"You might 'ave change and to spare, if you wouldn't be so hobstinate. There's Kit bin a speakin' to me agen about you—and worryin' to have the banns put up. I'm sure I wonder 'e cares tuppence for sich a contrairy creetur; but there's no accountin' for men's likin's. You'd better think over the matter agen, Bonnie, and take 'im. You won't 'ave sich another chance in a blue moon, and that's my opinion."

"Well, then, I *won't* 'ave 'im, and that's mine!" cried Bonnie, passionately. "I'll see 'im dead fust and myself too, for that matter. Not that I cares much when I dies," she continued, relapsing into quiet weeping, "for I'm sure I wish I was under the ground now, along of father and mother; for my life's a misery to me, and the sooner it's over the better."

"*And what should make it a misery, I'd like to*

know?" said Mrs. Bell, sharply. "You've got plenty of food and drink and good clothes, and a tight roof over your 'ead; and you might 'ave a husband into the bargain, as most gals 'ud jump at, but you treats the poor feller like dirt under your feet. What would you 'ave more, I wonder? tell me that, now!"

"Oh, I don't know; I don't know!" exclaimed poor Bonnie, rocking herself backwards and forwards; "but I wishes I was *dead*, I do—I wishes I was dead!"

CHAPTER XII.

"YOU MAY TELL 'IM THAT I'LL DO IT."

BONNIE did not give up her wanderings, for all her grandmother's railing; and Mrs. Bell was too much afraid of her granddaughter to press the matter and force her to remain at home. She was so unlike other girls, the old woman hardly knew what the consequences of opposition might be. There was a quiet persistence about her, which was more likely to gain her own way than any amount of loud talking and opposition. So she continued to slip away whenever her presence was not immediately necessary, and walk listlessly about the streets, in the vague hope of finding she hardly

knew what. She did not entirely neglect her duties at home, poor child! The "hupper rooms," as Mrs. Bell designated her first floor, were as carefully kept as they used to be in the days when they were occupied. The pictures Alfred Waverley had pasted on the wall were religiously dusted, and the little room looked as clean and inviting as though he were still expected to return to it. It was poor Bonnie's temple, and she worshipped there regularly, sending up her silent prayers in deep sighs to the memory of the idol who had once dwelt in the shrine. But she was more dreamy and absent than before: more useless, in fact, than she had ever been in the domestic duties of the house and shop: and many an old customer shook her head on leaving it, and said she was very much afraid that Mrs. Bell's girl was going "clean out of her head."

Bonnie was growing prettier than ever, for fretting had reduced her figure and refined her features, whilst the unalterable beauties of her face, her limpid blue eyes and soft abundant hair, naturally remained the same. Of course all this pining and misery was in consequence of Alfred Waverley's departure. Mrs. Bell did not suspect the cause, but poor Bonnie knew it well enough for herself. Yet she could not say she had any good reason to fret. *She had never entertained any hopes in that quarter:*

in fact, she had never recognised the feeling she entertained for their lodger until he had so suddenly left them. Three months had passed since that time—three long despairing months—and he had never come back even to see how they were getting on without him. Once, a parcel of illustrated books had arrived, addressed to Bonnie; but they had been sent straight from the publisher, and there was only a slip of paper inside one of them, with the inscription "From Alfred Waverley." The books were ranged upon her chest of drawers, dusted a dozen times a day, and never dusted without being kissed; but the donor had not followed his gift. And it was to try and see him that Bonnie slipped away whenever she had an opportunity, and roamed up and down the dusty London streets, peering wistfully into the face of every passer-by, in hopes of meeting the features she so much loved. Once, she had seen him dashing down the Strand in a curricule which he drove himself; but he had been too much occupied with his horses to hear the faint cry of pleasure with which she saluted him, or to see the figure of the girl—one amongst so many—that shrank back into the crowd as he drove out of sight. Another time, she had passed him almost shoulder to shoulder, as she leant against the railings of the Park gates gazing idly at the stream of car-

riages and people who were driving or walking up and down Rotten Row.

She had nearly failed to recognise on that occasion, in the fashionably-dressed young man, with a gardenia in his button-hole and the smallest of canes in his hand, their *ci-devant* lodger, Alfred Waverley, for Bonnie knew Vivian Chasemore by no other name. She had started as his handsome, delicately-cut profile came into view, and would have spoken, perhaps, had he not been in close attendance on two ladies whose faces Bonnie could not see. But what cared she for any one, poor child! except the one hero of her imagination, whom she would have walked a dozen miles any day to see but for a moment? She thought these passing visions of a glory and splendour into which she could never hope to enter did her good, but it was quite the reverse.

As soon as the excitement of seeing him had died away, a deeper depression than usual would succeed it; and Mrs. Bell had reason to remark, when she was wakened from her own slumbers to hear her grandchild sobbing in her sleep, that she didn't believe these long rambles did Bonnie any good. A third time the girl had met with Vivian Chasemore, and that was as he was driving from Howell and James's to his club, on the oc-

casion which has been narrated. Then, she had caught sight of him lolling luxuriously back in a carriage still more beautiful than the one he had occupied before, and evidently thinking of nothing but twirling his moustaches.

It was this vision, and the great gulf it seemed to mark between their past and future intercourse, that had sent poor Bonnie reeling with emotion and faintness against the steps of Messrs. Howell and James's establishment, and called forth the cruel suspicion from Lady William Nettleship that she was intoxicated. She hardly looked at the face of the lady who accosted her. She only remembered that some one had spoken and offered her money, and she had refused it. All her mind was filled with the sight she had seen: of her prince, raised, it is true, to the position he ought always to have occupied, but having left her, his humble little subject, so immeasurably far behind him.

Could that be the same gentleman, she argued with herself, as she took her way slowly homewards, on whom she had waited, for whom she had cooked, and who had thanked her so earnestly for the loan of her stuff-gown to keep the draught from the door when he was ill? Had she met him, well-dressed, driving about in a hansom, with a rose in his button-hole, she would have considered it only the natural

consequence of "coming into a fortune;" but so great a transformation scene as she had witnessed that day puzzled the weak little brain altogether. It was almost as wonderful as if he had gone to heaven itself, whence she had seen him return with a pair of glistening wings; and she would hardly have felt the gulf which had suddenly yawned between them to be greater than it was now. Still he was yet on earth, and Bonnie's most ambitious dream had resolved itself into the hope of once more becoming his servant. To be near him, she thought, to live under the same roof, to black his boots and make his bed, and keep his room bright and fresh and clean—this was the summit of her ambition.

She was quite ignorant of the style and manner in which young men of fortune live—had no knowledge of chambers, no idea of the duties of a valet, and thought that every unmarried gentleman kept some nice tidy girl to attend to his creature-comforts, and supply the place of a housekeeper and seamstress. She had done all that for him for the last four years—why should she not continue to do it now? The idea that he might take a wife to superintend his household never entered into Bonnie's calculations: chiefly because when she had suggested the idea he had denied it, and she was *simple enough* to believe him. All her anxiety now

was to be able to see Alfred Waverley alone, and find out where he lived, so that she might make the above proposal to him; and if he consented to it, she felt as if she should have gained everything she wished for in this world. Poor, silly Bonnie!

It was on the 8th of September that, as she was wandering about the streets where she had last seen Alfred Waverley, her listless steps took her towards Hanover Square, and her attention was attracted by a crowd gathered round the portals of that temple, the walls of which have perhaps re-echoed more lies than any other building in the world—the dead-alive but fashionable church of St. George. Patron of our country, what sin did you commit in slaying the enemy of mankind that your name should be desecrated for ever by connection with the great slave-market of England? Why should the valiant St. George, who trampled on the hydra-headed monster at the risk of his life, and prevailed in the name of God, be asked to preside at that ceremony jestingly termed religious, which forces a man to take an oath to honour for evermore that which he may discover before many months are over his head to be utterly unworthy of any feeling but contempt?

It was within these walls that the old Marquis of Drivelton paid his bill for the lovely Berengaria.

Bootless, the defrayal of which was attested with many congratulations by the clerical "middle-man" who blessed the barter, by which the unfortunate marquis found he had been so fearfully swindled a few years later. It was here that Lady Arabel Haut-ton exchanged her blue blood and aristocratic connections for young Stocktaker's twenty thousand a year, which resulted in a judicial separation and handsome alimony before many months were over their heads. It is here, in fact, that parsons bin and smile and pocket their fees, without even taking the trouble to inquire if their customers regard the observance in any light except a mercenary one: and it was here that Regina Nettleship, amidst the envy of all her female friends, was about to make herself over to Vivian Chasemore for the consideration of fifty thousand pounds. A wedding has always a special attraction for a woman, particularly if it be a handsome one. The carriages, with their grey horses and favours and bouquets; the dresses of the ladies; above all, the interest that clings about a bride and bridegroom, all combine to make our English slave sales very pretty shows.

So Bonnie pushed herself as near as she could to the steps of St. George's church to see all that was going on. There was a long string of carriages *drawn up in line*, waiting for the signal of a man :

the church-door to give them warning that the ceremony was over; but the handsomest of all, a barouche drawn by white horses, the coachman and footman of which wore immense bouquets of flowers in their button-holes, was ready in waiting at the bottom of the steps.

"That's for the bride and bridegroom," remarked a milliner's girl standing by Bonnie's side. "Lor! ain't some people in luck! Just look at them 'orses! They're fit for the queen."

"Is she very rich?" whispered Bonnie to her neighbour.

"I don't think so. We made part of the trousseau, and we didn't think great shakes of the dresses. But 'e is—rich as Greases, so I'm told, and 'ansome as a rose! I see 'im go in. And she's wearin' a lovely satin—twelve and sixpence a yard—but she's too pale to suit my fancy. I likes more colour," quoth the milliner's girl, who had not long left the country, and had two cheeks like peonies.

"Ere they are!" exclaimed the crowd, as the man at the church-door waved his arms frantically, and the coachmen flicked their horses' sides to wake them up, and the notes of a triumphal march pealed forth from the organ inside. But it was a false alarm. The wedding-party had only turned from

the altar into the vestry to receipt the bill and give the "middle-man" his fee.

"Stand back there!" exclaimed a fierce-looking policeman, as he thrust the crowd of gaping nursermaids, children, and milliners farther away, and the man at the door exhibited fast-increasing excitement. There was a crimson roll of druggeting laid from the church-door to the bottom of the steps, on which Bonnie gazed with silent awe.

"That's for the ladies' dresses," explained his obliging neighbour. "There's the beautifullest lot of satins and silks as I've seen for a long time here to-day, and it's strange, too, considering it's out of the season. But then the bridegroom's got such a lot of money, of course they'd like to 'ave everything conformable to his riches."

"What's his name?" demanded Bonnie.

"I can't tell you. *She's* a Miss Nettleship, grand daughter of a real duke—or at least they say so—though they may only have made it up after a while. But bless you! here they are!"

Bonnie looked up quickly, and her eyes naturally fell first upon the bride. Regina looked handsomer in her wedding attire than most brides do. The intense whiteness of her dress did not clash with her pale wax-like complexion. She looked like a beautiful statue as she moved down the aisle.

son-carpeted steps, her golden hair crowned with myrtle and orange-blossom, and the train of her satin robe sweeping imperially a yard behind her. Bonnie could not take her eyes off the bride's face: she had quite forgotten the bridegroom as she gazed at Regina's classical features.

"Ain't he a picter of a man?" whispered the milliner's apprentice. "Don't let him go afore you've had a good look at him. See! he's turning 'is 'ead now! Ain't he beautiful! Twice as 'andsome as *she*, in my opinion."

Bonnie suddenly diverted her eyes in the direction of Vivian Chasemore. He was standing at the carriage-door, helping his bride to settle herself and her voluminous drapery in the vehicle, and Bonnie had a full view of him.

"He—he—" she stammered, pointing him out to her neighbour with a shaking finger, "he ain't the groom!"

"In course he is! who else? Don't you see his light pants and tie, and the white rose in his button-hole? Why, I know 'im as well as can be! He often come with Miss Nettleship when she worried us about her dresses."

"He's married to *her*!" gasped Bonnie again, as her face turned to an ashen hue.

"Why, where 'ave you bin bred? Did you ever

see anybody but the groom bring the bride out of church? In course 'e's the one. Now 'e's got into the same carriage and driven off with 'er. Do you want a better proof than that? One would think you had never seen a wedding before! Oh, I say! jest look at this shaking old guy! That's her mother. We made that dress too. It's brocade. It cost seventeen and sixpence a yard. Do you like the colour?"

But Bonnie made no answer to this question. Something had seemed to stop going near her heart as she caught sight of Alfred Waverley's face, and now her head was growing heavier and heavier and her legs seemed to give way under her, and in another moment she had sunk fainting to the ground.

"Oh! I say, Mr. Policeman, here's somebody ill!" gasped the milliner's apprentice, as Bonnie's sudden fall diverted her attention from the rest of the wedding group. "Who'll carry 'er out of the crush? Won't some of you gentlemen make yourselves pleasant? The poor gal's in a dead swoon."

Two or three of the "gentlemen" alluded to, who consisted of butcher boys with trays of meat, law clerks with blue bags, and crossing-sweepers, came forward and lifted poor Bonnie from under the feet of the gaping crowd. The policeman, in *hopes of finding she was intoxicated*, followed in

their wake until he saw her deposited on a doorstep opposite, where a large number of the sight-seers also congregated, by way of keeping out the air. The show opposite was nearly over—the best of the dresses and bonnets had driven away; and as there was a chance of the stranger being in a fit, or dead, they considered it but prudent to secure the front row of seats for the new performance. Bonnie disappointed them, however. It is true that the last carriage had disappeared from St. George's, Hanover Square, before she re-opened her sad, misty blue eyes; but then, although she looked very confused, it was evident that before long she would get up and walk home again, and the majority of her audience turned away with a snort of disgust, and went off in search of further excitement.

"Where am I?—What are you doing?—Who brought me here?" exclaimed Bonnie with a puzzled air, as she came to her senses.

"Why, you've bin a bit ill," replied her milliner friend, who still kept by her side. "We was lookin' at the weddin'—don't you remember?—and the crush was too much for you."

"Ah, the wedding!" repeated Bonnie faintly, as she closed her eyes and seemed as if she were about to faint again.

"Come along! don't let's have no more of that

nonsense!" interposed the policeman roughly, as he raised the girl into a standing position by pulling her up by one arm. "You can walk well enough if you choose, and if you don't clear out of this, sharp, I shall send for a stretcher and carry you. You've blocked up the highway long enough."

"Ugh, you brute!" exclaimed the staunch little milliner. "How dare you speak to my friend like that! Anybody can see how ill she is, and she don't stir from here till she's able to walk, unless you choose to pay for a cab for her. You take my arm, dear," she continued to Bonnie, "and come 'ome with me for a minnit, and get a drink of water. I don't live above a stone's throw from here."

Bonnie was half-standing, half-leaning against the door of the house, upon the steps of which she had been placed. Her head still felt very giddy and confused, but she understood the words addressed to her, and did what she was required.

"Now, Mr. Policeman, you just put your 'and under her other arm, and 'elp 'er along that way. There! that's better; she can walk a little now, and between us we shall manage to get her to my 'ouse."

The milliner's house turned out to be a dirty lodging, where she and a dozen other apprentices *slept every night* under the charge of a snuffy old

woman, who was induced, however, by Bonnie's pretty face and respectable appearance, to allow her to rest for a few minutes, whilst her new acquaintance fetched her a glass of water. The girl sat when they pushed her into a chair, and drank when they held the water to her lips, but all she did was done mechanically; and after their humble attentions were concluded, she continued to stare into vacancy, as if she noticed nothing before her.

"She ain't come to her right senses yet," whispered the apprentice to the old woman. The policeman had taken his departure as soon as he had seen her to the door.

"Has she ever had 'em?" inquired the other, doubtfully.

"Oh yes! She was right enough whilst we was lookin' at the weddin'. But the 'eat took 'er, and she dropped all of a sudden."

"Ah, well! she looks badly now, don't she?"

"I must go!" ejaculated Bonnie, slowly, as she rose from her seat.

"Where do you live—far off from here? Are you well enough to walk by yerself, dear? Rest a bit longer if you feels inclined," said the kind-hearted little apprentice.

But Bonnie shook off her touch, and with a quiet "Thank you," moved towards the door. They un-

latched it and let her go forth, and watched her staggering slowly down the street.

"She ain't fit to walk alone," remarked the milliner, "but I 'aven't the time to go with 'er—I'm hours late as it is. La! poor thing! how she reels. She looks as if she'd topple over every minnit."

"She'll be 'run in' by some of them nasty policemen afore she's gone a quarter of a mile," remarked the old woman, as Bonnie turned the corner and passed out of view.

But so dire a certainty did not befall her, though how she groped her way from Hanover Square to Drury Lane that day, the poor child never knew. It was accomplished at last, however, though it must have taken her hours, for the clock was striking four as she dragged her weary form into her grandmother's parlour.

"Bless me, Bonnie, how white you look! and wherever have you bin all this time?" exclaimed Mrs. Bell, as the girl laid her head back in her chair and fainted away again.

The old woman was really fond of her granddaughter, however much she railed against her, and Bonnie's unusual illness alarmed her. She used every known means to restore her to consciousness, and then, attributing the accident to the oppressive *heat of the autumn*, and weakness consequent upon

it, she made Bonnie go upstairs to bed, and waited on her for the rest of the day as actively as if she had been twenty years old instead of seventy.

"Grandmother!" said the girl feebly that evening, as Mrs. Bell sat by her bedside with her knitting in her hand, "do you want me to marry that feller Masters?"

"Want you to marry 'im, Bonnie! Why, in course I do; and I can't 'elp thinking you're a great fool to refuse to keep company with 'im. I ain't so young as I was, you know, my dear, and afore long it'll be time for me to join your poor grandfather and my dear boy Joe, and then what's to become of you, left all alone, with the shop on your 'ands?"

"And will it 'elp you if I marries him?" continued Bonnie.

"That it will—in a measure—for I shouldn't wonder if we ended by making it one concern. But anyways, it'll take you off my 'ands for keep, and you eats hearty in general, you know, Bonnie, and don't do nothin' towards earnin' your food."

"All right, then—you may tell 'im as I'll do it!"

Mrs. Bell dropped her knitting in her astonishment.

"You'll marry 'im, Bonnie? Well, I never! There's no knowin' the twists and turns of a woman's mind."

However, 'e'll jump at the hoffer, never you fear, and we'll 'ear the banns next Sunday."

And in her enthusiasm Mrs. Bell actually kissed Bonnie's cheek—a weakness in which the poor do not indulge as freely as the rich.

The girl turned her face to the wall as soon as her grandmother's eyes were off her, and cried in silence. She was rough in speech and manner, and ignorant in mind; but there was a spirit of determination and endurance in the character of Bonnie Bell which was only just beginning to struggle into life.

CHAPTER XIII.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?"

SELINA FARTHINGALE was one of the guests at Regina Nettleship's wedding, and highly delighted had she been to accept an invitation that held out the prospect of a whole day spent in the society of Sir Arthur Chasemore. She had wasted at least two weeks beforehand in designing and ordering her dress for the eventful occasion, and Miss Janet Openheim and she had nearly turned their brains in endeavouring to decide the relative merits of *sky-blue*, *sea-green*, and *pink*.

"This satin is lovely, dear Miss Farthingale," Miss Oppenheim affirmed in her purring tones; "it is fit for a duchess, and would look so rich with a white lace mantle and bonnet: but then, only just see how the pink silk suits your complexion, and yet this Chambéry gauze would be so light and elegant over your mauve under-skirt. Oh dear! oh dear! it is almost impossible to give an opinion upon so many beautiful things!"

"But the time is getting on, and we really must decide," replied Selina; "so what do you say, Janet, to this pale pink silk, with a lace mantle and bonnet with blush roses?"

"Oh! lovely—lovely! exquisite!" exclaimed her companion, clasping her hands; "nothing in the world could be in better taste!"

"Or the sky-blue, with forget-me-nots in my bonnet," continued Selina, musingly; "the 'forget-me not' is such a sweet flower—so full of touching ideas and recollections."

"Oh! very—very! Quite so! Nothing could be sweeter than 'forget-me-nots'!" chimed in Miss Janet.

"Or a dove-grey satin with white roses! Gentlemen like quiet modest colours as a rule, only dove-grey is rather an *elderly* tint for a woman of my age."

"Oh! much too old, dear Miss Farthingale. I am sure *he* would rather see you in pink—*couleur de rose*, you know, as your life is sure to be."

"What a flatterer you are, Janet! And what right have you to allude to any particular *he*? I spoke of gentlemen in general."

"I know you did, dear; still, we may all have our thoughts, may we not? And you know he is to be best man, and will have no eyes for any one but yourself."

"I don't know that! I believe it is the custom for the best man to take in the principal bridesmaid to breakfast. I think it was most ill-natured of Regina Nettleship to leave me out of the list of bridesmaids, and particularly as none of them are her relations."

"She was afraid you would cut all the rest out—that was her reason, dear Miss Farthingale, you may depend upon it."

"I dare say it was. There is not one of the set who can wear such a dress as myself! But she had the impertinence to tell me that they were none of them above twenty, and it would be to my disadvantage to be seen amongst them!"

"Oh! the envious silly thing!" cried Miss Oppenheim. "Any one could see through that excuse,

dear Miss Farthingale. She knew, of course, that you would put them all in the shade."

"And I mean to do it, if possible. I think after all I will decide on the pink, Janet. And I shall wear the set of pearls papa gave me last birthday. I do not believe that Regina herself will have any ornaments to compare with them, although Lady William never loses an opportunity of thrusting Vivian Chasemore and his generosity down my throat."

"She guesses you will have the title, dear Miss Farthingale, and be the head of the family, and the poor old woman naturally feels jealous. They won't boast so much of their wedding after they have seen *yours*."

"You naughty girl! You really mustn't talk of my prospects so openly. You know that nothing is settled yet. Though my papa certainly has it in his power to spend twice as much money on such an occasion as the Nettleships."

"And he'll do it, too. You must mind and observe every little detail of the wedding, dear, that we may compare notes afterwards."

"I will, unless something very particular distracts my attention. I wish you were going with us, Janet. You would have been able to look about you well, without let or hindrance."

"How *could* I have mixed in such a gay scene in my deep mourning, dear Miss Farthingale! And even might I have changed it for that day, I have no money to buy gay dresses with. You forget that everybody is not as happily situated as yourself."

Selina's sallow complexion grew darker with a blush of discomposure.

"I am sure my papa would have advanced you a little money, Janet, or given it, if necessary. I have told you how hard he is trying to save something for you out of the remnant of your aunt's small fortune."

"Oh! he is goodness itself. But I was not asked to the wedding, you know, and so there need be no question about the matter. I shall dress you with my own hands, and then sit at home, thinking how beautiful you look and how much you are enjoying yourself, until you come back to tell me all about it."

Selina looked down upon her humble-minded friend almost affectionately. She really would have enjoyed taking Miss Oppenheim to the wedding, if only to hear her own praises continually dinned into her ear. But Regina Nettleship had not included Selina's jackal in her invitation. She had sent cards to the Farthingales themselves only at the solicitation of Vivian Chasemore, who considered that the man

who had been the means of restoring him to his friends and fortune had some claim upon his hospitality on such an occasion. So that Miss Farthingale in her pink silk and roses, and her little father in a brand-new suit, had been amongst the earliest arrivals at St. George's church on the memorable morning when poor Bonnie Bell saw her idol shattered before her eyes, and Regina Nettleship swept down the steps as Mrs. Vivian Chasemore.

As Lady William had no accommodation for a wedding-party at her dingy little lodgings, Mrs. Stingo had been kind enough to place her grand rooms at her disposal for the reception of her friends at breakfast, and thither the carriages took their way, as, one by one, they rolled from the church-doors. Mrs. Stingo had another motive than that of accommodating Lady William's guests for her apparent amiability. Which of these women of the world ever do an act of kindness towards another from the single-hearted wish to be amiable? She lent her rooms, it is true, and permitted her servants to help in waiting at table, but she knew well enough she should get her *quid pro quo* in the notices of the *Court Circular* and *Morning Post*, and most probably the *kudos* into the bargain of having provided the wedding breakfast.

It brought around her also (as Lady William had

already done in her own person) a number of people who would never have known her for herself, but of whose acquaintance she should ever afterwards be able to boast. Whilst the people themselves knew they would be under no obligation to do more than bow to Mrs. Stingo, should ill-luck bring them across her path again. So everybody was well satisfied upon Regina Nettleship's wedding morning.

And no one more so than Selina Farthingale. It is true that the exigencies of society compelled Sir Arthur to sit beside one of the bridesmaids at the breakfast-table, but she happened to be a girl whose own wedding was fixed for only a fortnight later, and so Miss Farthingale had no fear of her attractions endangering her cause with the baronet. She gazed upon him so continually during the progress of the meal, as entirely to neglect her own appetite and the partner who sat beside her; and when, as best man, he rose to return thanks for the health of the bridesmaids, she thought his speech was the most eloquent and the best delivered that she had ever heard. In fact, the solicitor's daughter was more enamoured of the baronet, and more determined by hook or by crook to win him for herself, than she had ever been before.

At last the tedious ordeal of wading through a *heavy and indigestible meal*, at an hour when no

one is accustomed to eat anything at all, was over, and the bridegroom had been brought to his feet, and made to look very foolish and utter a great deal of unmeaning tautology; whilst the bride kept her eyes fixed upon her lap, and played nervously with her gloves and bouquet. Everything had been done, in fact, to make everybody else feel as uncomfortable as they possibly could.

And now the signal was given for the bride to retire and change her white satin robes for a costume more suitable to the railway-train. The ladies fluttered about the stairs and the entrance to her dressing-chamber, until she emerged again, radiant in peacock-blue, but with the same lack of blushing diffidence about her which she had worn throughout the ceremony. She bid good-bye to her mother and friends with the most perfect calmness; and Mrs. Vivian Chasemore might have been married for ten years, as her husband handed her into the carriage which was to convey them to the station, and waved his hand excitedly to the crowd of friends who stood upon the doorsteps and threw rice after them, which settled in his shirt-collar and the folds of his wife's dress, and occupied them for some time in trying to get rid of again. So dubious are the blessings this world bestows upon us!

With the departure of the bride and bridegroom,

the life of a wedding-party ceases. We think, not without envy, perhaps, of how happy they will be, if only for a few days; of how happy we once thought we should be, and how differently everything turned out from what we expected. There are few married people to whom the sight of a wedding does not bring sad thoughts; few unmarried ones to whom it is not a source of envy. And neither melancholy nor envy is a pleasant companion. So that the first question a wedding-party asks, on being left alone, is: "What shall we do to amuse ourselves?"

It seems to be such a dull climax to the morning festivity to have to go home at three o'clock in the afternoon, and take off the pink and blue satins and don again the dark every-day dress, and wait patiently for dinner and roast mutton, which no one feels disposed to eat, with the taste of the breakfast viands yet in their mouths.

Lady William's party was no exception to this rule. As soon as ever Mr. and Mrs. Vivian Chase-more had driven out of sight, they fell upon Mrs. Stingo, and implored her to let them finish up the day with a dance.

"Not a late dance, you know, dear Mrs. Stingo," cried the bridesmaids, with one voice, "but just a *carpet-hop*, and home at ten o'clock; but now that

dear Regina's gone, we shall be so dull without her!"

Mrs. Stingo was quite ready to accede to their desire. She was too fat and old to dance herself; but she would have felt as dull as the young ones, left to Mr. Stingo and her own meditations after so much gaiety, and so she consented to the plan, and sent out to secure a pianist, and invited everybody to stay at her house for the remainder of the day.

The majority of the guests took advantage of her kindness. Selina was amongst them. She had seconded the bridesmaids' proposal of a dance with great avidity. She had even gone so far as to whisper to them that if Mrs. Stingo objected to the plan, they should carry it out at her father's house. She had not been able to do more than look at and listen to Sir Arthur Chasemore as yet, and the prospect of an afternoon and evening spent in his company was too delightful. On such an occasion, too, so full of pleasant associations, what might not the result of a *tête-à-tête* be?

She was so eager and excited at the idea, that it was some little time before she missed the presence of the baronet from the house, and no one seemed to know where he had gone. Some thought he must have business of importance in hand, and had slipped away to attend to it; others, that he

had accompanied his cousins to the station, and would be back in half an hour.

But the half-hour came and went, and Sir Arthur had not re-appeared. Selina was terribly put out, though she did not dare to show it. As the afternoon wore on she lost her temper completely, and even proposed to go home without waiting for the evening's amusement. But her father perceived her humour, and urged her to remain. He thought it so probable that Sir Arthur had engaged to look after some of Vivian's domestic matters for him during his absence, and had determined to get the business over at once, in order to be free to return to Mrs. Stingo's for the dance in the evening. And on that supposition Selina consented to stay with the ladies during the afternoon, and share their tea and listen to their babble of the compliments they had received that morning and the partners they hoped to secure that evening, whilst they re-arranged their *chevelures* and shook out their tumbled skirts.

When they descended to the drawing-room they were a very gay-looking party: a little jaded, perhaps, with the fatigues of the day, but still quite lively enough to tire out the fingers of the pianist who piped to their dancing. But Sir Arthur was not amongst the white-gloved creatures who, one *after another*, solicited the honour of Miss Farthin-

gale's hand in the giddy waltz, and her father's avowal that the baronet had not been seen again confirmed her fears.

"I would much rather go home," she said fretfully. "I am tired to death with so much standing about, and have not strength for a single dance. Do go and make my excuses to Mrs. Stingo, papa, whilst I slip upstairs for my mantle and bonnet."

"Won't it look rather strange, your leaving so suddenly?" he remonstrated. "Remember how eager you were that she should allow you to remain."

"Well, one cannot always be accountable for one's feelings, I suppose," was the tart reply. "I didn't know I should be so tired. Anyway, I shall go home, and you must make the best excuses for me in your power."

No one attempted to detain them, and the father and daughter found their way back without the slightest trouble. It was not much more than eight o'clock, but Selina dragged her weary feet up the staircase as though she had been dancing for hours. All the buoyancy had left her frame with the departure of the faithless baronet.

"Why not go straight up to your bedroom, Selina, since you are so tired?" said Mr. Farthingale, as she approached the drawing-room door.

"Because *I don't choose*," she snapped in answer.

"Besides, I want Janet Oppenheim to come with me and help me to undress. She will be dying to hear all about this grand wedding, and what we have seen and done."

She threw the door open as she spoke, and advanced into the room, which was brilliantly lighted. It appeared to be empty. But from an inner apartment, divided from the first by folding-doors, there came a smothered exclamation and a start at her sudden entrance, and in another instant there issued from it Miss Janet Oppenheim, sleek and smooth and unruffled as though she had been detected reading her Bible, whilst behind her in the semi-darkness loomed the tall figure of Sir Arthur Chasemore! Selina was thrown off her guard.

"What are you doing here?" she exclaimed angrily.

"*Doing!* dear Miss Farthingale," replied Miss Oppenheim's meek voice, "do you mean *me*, or your friend Sir Arthur? I was reading when he came in, and he was *so* disappointed at not finding you at home, that I ventured to suggest he should stay a little while to see if you returned. Oh, I hope I didn't do wrong! I thought you could not possibly be much later, and Sir Arthur would have been *so sorry to go* again without having seen you."

But Selina's mind was full of suspicion. She

turned from Miss Oppenheim without answering and addressed her father.

"Did not Sir Arthur understand there was to be a dance at the Stingoes' this evening, papa?"

"I don't know, my dear, I'm sure," stammered the lawyer; "I thought he did—but I suppose he didn't, or he wouldn't be here. Did Mrs. Stingo say nothing to you about the dance, Sir Arthur?"

"A dance!" replied the baronet. "No! Where? What, at her house? She must be mad to think any one could dance after such a fatiguing day. I was obliged to leave directly after the breakfast in consequence of business, and I came round here this evening, in hopes of seeing you and Miss Farthingale for a quiet chat over the events of the morning. It all went off very well, didn't it, Miss Farthingale? The lady looked a trifle pale, perhaps; but Vivian was quite himself, and made an excellent speech. I thought it was the prettiest wedding I had ever seen."

"Oh, indeed!" said Selina, spitefully. "I am glad to hear you say so, but I think, *under the circumstances*, it would have been wiser for you to remain as the others did, instead of running away in that unaccountable manner directly the breakfast was over. *Some* people might be ill-natured enough to infer that the sight of Miss Nettleship's marriage had been too much for you."

Sir Arthur's brow lowered.

"I should not have been present at all had that been the case," he answered.

The attendance at Regina's marriage had been a very painful duty to him, but he did not choose that Selina Farthingale should twit him on the subject. He had not yet forgiven Vivian Chasemore for succeeding where he had failed, nor his wife for aiding and abetting this success, but he hoped he had hidden his anger and envy from the world. And that he had not been able to do so, only created a greater desire in his mind for revenge against those to whom he owed the humiliation.

Mr. Farthingale saw the baronet's discomfiture and was amazed at his daughter's want of tact.

"Of course not," he said, with an attempt to smooth over Selina's rough speech. "I can't think what made you say such a thing, my dear, when every one has been talking of Sir Arthur's affection for his cousin, and the beautiful manner in which he showed it in his speech-to-day."

"Ah, well! it is not of much consequence," replied Selina, with attempted indifference; and then she turned sharply upon Janet Oppenheim. "And pray, how long is it since you have taken to sitting *in the drawing-room* in our absence, Miss Oppenheim? I thought you preferred to occupy the work-

room upstairs. I am sure I have heard you say so, often enough!"

"Oh yes, dear Miss Farthingale! it is a most charming little room, and I like it better than any in the house. I *was* sitting there, reading those sweet verses of dear Martin Tupper; but when your friend Sir Arthur arrived, I thought *you* had come back, and ran down to meet you, and then, to my astonishment, I found he was alone, and wished to await your return."

But the pertinacious way in which Miss Janet mentioned "*your* friend Sir Arthur" did not satisfy Selina Farthingale. She felt intuitively that something was wrong somewhere, and was angry with herself for not being able to find it out.

"Next time my friends call in my absence then, I advise you to receive them in the front drawing-room where the gas is lighted, instead of the back where there is none," she answered. "What on earth you can find to amuse you by sitting in the dark, I cannot imagine."

At this remark, Janet Oppenheim's pallid cheek actually flushed, and Sir Arthur looked uneasy.

"Oh, dear Miss Farthingale," the girl exclaimed, "how funny you are! We had *only just* gone into the back room. Sir Arthur wished to see your last photograph, and I went to get it off the mantel-

piece; and it was hardly worth while to have the gas lighted for that, was it now?"

"Well, I suppose you could have got it by yourself, and did not require Sir Arthur's assistance. You have grown terribly weak all of a sudden," retorted Selina.

The two men looked at each other in silence. It was hopeless to try and stem the torrent of the feminine tongues. Sir Arthur thought it was time to take his leave.

"I think, as you appear so tired with the day's ceremony, Miss Farthingale, that I will say good-night," he observed quietly, as he bowed and left the room. Then Selina saw that she had made a great mistake.

"Now, you've frightened him away," said her father; "what was the use of making such a fuss about nothing, Selina? The man would have spent the rest of the evening here, if you had only left him alone."

"Oh, *he* is not the one to blame!" replied Selina, tossing her head.

"Are you angry with *me* then, dear Miss Farthingale?" demanded Janet, with pleading eyes. "How could *I* help his coming here? He was so *anxious* to see you—to speak *alone* with you, I *think*—and I hadn't the heart to send him away,

when I considered that perhaps he had hardly had an opportunity to say a word to you all day. I wish now that I had never come down to see him at all, but it was for *your* sake, dear friend—it was all for *your* sake, believe me!”

But Selina would not believe.

“I suppose it was for *my* sake you were shut up in the back drawing-room together. You had better be a little less friendly on my account next time, that’s all I have to say.”

“Oh, she won’t hear me! She won’t hear me!” cried Miss Oppenheim, weeping. “Mr. Farthingale, plead my cause with her, I implore you!”

“I think we had better put off this discussion till to-morrow morning,” said the lawyer. “Go to bed, Miss Oppenheim, and say no more about it. Selina will see things in a different light when you meet again.”

“*See things in a different light!*” exclaimed his daughter angrily, as the door closed upon her weeping friend. “I shall do no such thing! Papa, there can be but one issue to this business. That girl leaves our house to-morrow.”

“Just as you please, my dear; just as you please. But you know the difficulties that stand in the way.”

“*Bother the difficulties!* I will get over them;

but she doesn't stay here a day longer. The false, deceitful little cat! Cannot you see that she is trying to play a deep game with regard to Sir Arthur? She wants to get him for herself, with her languishing eyes and pensive downcast looks. How I hate all women and their double ways!"

Selina was pacing up and down the house, in her fury.

"My dear! you must be mistaken. It is quite impossible she can have so much presumption."

"Papa, you men can never see an inch beyond your noses! There is no limit to the presumption of some creatures. Doubtless Miss Oppenheim thinks her youth and beauty will outweigh my riches any day; but she has had her last opportunity for inveigling that poor man into her clutches. I won't stand by and see my friends deceived in that fashion. She shall leave this house before to-morrow night."

"How do you propose to manage it, Selina?"

"I shall tell her that we are obliged to leave town at once, and that as we cannot let her live alone here during our absence, she had better look out for another home. Miss Netherwood would receive her at Clarence Lodge. She has a lot of pupil teachers. Why cannot you go the first thing *to-morrow morning* to Clarence Lodge, papa, and

make the necessary arrangements? Tell Miss Netherwood that the girl has been thrown upon our hands, and we wish to place her there until matters are more settled. I fancy Miss Netherwood will board and lodge her in return for her services, and it's the most that she can expect."

"It will seem rather sudden, won't it?"

"I don't care if it does. She shall not remain here to upset all my plans."

"Will you guarantee to make it all right with Janet Oppenheim, my dear? Remember that I particularly wish her to suppose that she is dependent upon me."

"She understands it well enough. I was speaking of it to her only the other day. If you will settle the matter with Miss Netherwood, I will manage the rest, and take the girl to Clarence Lodge myself to-morrow afternoon."

"Very well, my dear; very well," replied the little lawyer, with a sigh; "it shall be as you wish. But, whatever you do, keep up the supposition that she is penniless. It will be easy to profess to have recovered her money when I find myself in a position to pay it. But you must be "my lady" before that happens, Selina."

But the smile with which his daughter greeted this asseveration was not quite so confident as usual.

CHAPTER XIV.

"MARRY MISS FARTHINGALE! I COULDN'T DO IT!"

SELINA was as good as her word; but with this difference. The night's meditation had not caused her to hesitate in the slightest degree in her determination to turn Janet Oppenheim from the house; but she had arrived at the conclusion that it would be advisable not to link that determination in any way with her conduct respecting Sir Arthur. She would appear to have entirely forgotten the unpleasantness of the evening before, and to be occupied solely with thoughts of the new complication that had arisen. As soon as ever the early post had been delivered on the following morning, therefore, she sent her maid to Miss Oppenheim's room with the announcement that she had received very important intelligence, and wished to see her as soon as possible. Janet hurried on her dressing-gown and joined her in a few minutes.

"Oh, dear Miss Farthingale!" she commenced plaintively, "I have scarcely slept a wink all night—your words made me so miserable. Pray tell me *that* I am forgiven! I shall know no rest until I *have* your assurance that it is so."

"What *do* you mean?" demanded Selina, with affected surprise.

"Why, this unfortunate business with Sir Arthur, of course. I am sure I wish I had remained upstairs altogether, and never gone into that wretched back drawing-room."

"Oh, pray don't say another word about it! I thought something frightful had happened, from your tragic manner. I was so tired last night that I can hardly remember what *did* happen. But we have had such bad news this morning that it is enough to put anything out of one's head."

"Bad news! What is it?"

"Papa's aunt, Mrs. General Featherstone, who lives at Plymouth—you must have heard me speak of her——"

Janet had never heard any such thing, but she exclaimed:

"Oh yes, yes! Pray go on!"

"She is *very ill*—dying, we are afraid—and she is like papa's mother, you know, if not more."

"How very sad!"

"Isn't it? It has cut us up terribly. But we must go to her at once. The case admits of no delay. If we could have caught the morning mail, we should. As it is, we must travel this afternoon."

"But you will soon return?"

"I am afraid not. However her illness ends, papa says we shall be detained some time at Plymouth. And what we are now thinking of is yourself, and where to place you during our absence."

"Why cannot I stay here, dear Miss Farthingale, and look after the house for you?"

"Oh dear, no! that would never do! Our friends would talk about it. You do not know how very particular we have to be in London. You would lose your character if you lived by yourself."

"Then what am I to do—a poor orphan, without friends or a home to go to?"

"Papa has thought of a home for you, and has already gone to make the necessary arrangements for your staying there. It is with a lady of our acquaintance, a Miss Netherwood, who has a charming house and academy at Clarence Lodge in St. John's Wood."

Selina could not deceive Miss Oppenheim. She saw through the *ruse* at once.

"In what capacity am I to go there?" she asked, in a voice apparently as meek as usual.

"Well, my dear Janet, I need not repeat to you *what I have said* so often, that though my dear

father is goodness itself, yet you have really no claim upon him, and it is hardly to be expected that he could keep you here for a lifetime at his own expense."

"Of course not, and I know how much I am already indebted to Mr. Farthingale's benevolence. But still, when he has rescued that 'small portion of money which he hopes to save from the wreck of my poor aunt's little fortune,' will he not be able to repay himself for his great generosity to me?" demanded Miss Janet from beneath the long light lashes of her meek pale eyes.

Selina coloured at the remark, innocently as it appeared to be made.

"I do not know, I am sure; and any way, it is quite a chance if he is successful. Meanwhile, you could not do better than accept a home with Miss Netherwood, who is kindness itself."

"As a teacher I suppose, Miss Farthingale?"

"I fancy you may be asked to do a little in that way; but if so, the duties will be very light. I am sure you will be charmed with Clarence Lodge. Such a lovely garden and croquet-lawn, and the young ladies from the very first families. I was finished there myself."

"How *interesting!* and I trust that the good

education I received at St Anne's College may enable me to satisfy Miss Netherwood's requirements as a teacher. I think I told you that my dear aunt, Mrs. Mathers, was really educating me for the position of a governess, *until* her grandson died, and she considered there was no further necessity for it," said Janet Oppenheim, fixing her eyes upon Selina's face.

"How much does she know—or not know?" thought that lady, as she turned uneasily away.

"How soon will you be ready to start for Clarence Lodge?" she asked presently.

"Oh, whenever you wish it, dear Miss Farthingale; directly after breakfast, if convenient to yourself. I have little to pack, you know," with a humble smile, "and my few poor possessions will soon be put together. But how shall I ever, *ever* thank you for all your goodness and hospitality to me?" said Miss Janet fervently, as she raised her handkerchief to her eyes and rushed from the room.

Selina was astonished at the readiness with which her proposal had been acceded to. She would have been still more astonished, perhaps, had she seen Miss Janet Oppenheim's behaviour when *alone* in her own room.

"*So I am to go!*" she said between her teeth.

“Very good, Miss Farthingale; very good. Your reason is clear enough to me. And so I will go, but I’ll take some one with me, or my name’s not Janet Oppenheim! I suppose you think St. John’s Wood is too far off to make an appointment from, and that there are no such things as pillar-posts there. But I fancy you will find you are rather out of your reckoning, my dear. You had better have kept me under your own eye by a vast deal, and so had your cheating old father. But I’ll be a match for the pair of you yet, although I *am* so much indebted to Mr. Farthingale’s benevolence and hospitality.”

No one who had seen Janet Oppenheim descend to the breakfast-room an hour afterwards, meekly clad in her mourning robes, with her colourless hair banded smoothly on her forehead would have credited the amount of stinging sarcasm with which she had delivered the foregoing speech when there was no one but herself to listen to it. But she was as vicious in her temper and disposition as Selina Farthingale, and a thousand times more dangerous, because she had acquired the facility of concealing what she felt.

Mr. Farthingale, having strictly obeyed the instructions of his daughter, was enabled by eleven o’clock to send her a telegram from his office in

the city, saying that Miss Netherwood was ready to receive Miss Oppenheim at any moment. The fact is the mistress of Clarence Lodge had many business dealings with Mr. Farthingale's firm, as to that gentleman's trust was confided the payment for more than one of her pupils' education; and it was to her interest to oblige him in any way that was possible.

So that she had readily consented to receive Miss Oppenheim as an extra teacher, her board and lodging to be accepted in return for her services, and her allowance for dress to be paid by Mr. Farthingale until he was able to make some more permanent arrangements on her behalf.

The little lawyer did not feel quite easy when he had completed the transaction, for he was not so sure of his self-elected ward as Selina seemed to be. However, one thing was certain, the two girls could not continue under the same roof after what had taken place the evening before, and all he hoped was that Janet might not come to a knowledge of the true state of her affairs until he found himself in a better position to account for them.

He was thinking a great deal on the subject, wondering if his daughter would ever marry the *baronet*, and if so, what were the best means by

which to hasten such a blessed consummation, when Sir Arthur himself entered the grimy little office.

"Come in, Sir Arthur, come in!" exclaimed his would-be father-in-law, as he heartily grasped his hand; "it is not often we see you here, is it? You're more of a West-end bird than an East-end—eh, Sir Arthur? But I suppose you've come on some of Mr. Vivian Chasemore's business, since he is not here to transact it for himself."

"No, Mr. Farthingale, I have not. Strange as you may think it, I am here to consult you about my own. I should have spoken last night, perhaps, had it not been for the untoward little circumstance that parted us. I trust Miss Farthingale has recovered her fatigue of yesterday."

Which meant, "I trust that Miss Farthingale has recovered her abominably bad temper," but the father did not take it so. He only read in the words anxiety for Selina's welfare, and began to think the time had arrived for him to put in a word on her behalf.

"Thank you, Sir Arthur, thank you. My daughter is quite well again this morning, *physically* speaking, though a little upset still from the event you allude to. She has been too kind to Miss Oppenheim altogether—too indulgent and generous—and the girl's

ingratitude has naturally affected her. But she is struggling against her feelings—bravely—bravely!”

Sir Arthur did not know what answer to make to this harangue. He intensely disliked Selina Farthingale, and could not understand in what Janet Oppenheim had been ungrateful, so he turned the subject.

“I have come to you, Mr. Farthingale, sooner than to a stranger, because you know all about our family affairs, and will understand the reasons that may have led me to this necessity. The fact is, I am in a bit of a hole, and I want you to pull me through.”

“A bit of a hole, Sir Arthur! Do I understand you to mean you are in debt?”

“Well! very slightly—nothing when you come to figures—only a few hundred pounds. But you see during those months that my cousin Vivian was not forthcoming, and I naturally hoped—I mean I naturally *feared*—that he might never be heard of again, and my grandfather’s fortune would revert to me, I let out rather more than had been my custom, or than was, perhaps, prudent of me, and the consequence is, I find myself a little in arrears.”

Mr. Farthingale no longer “began to think” that *this* was the opportunity to introduce Selina’s name. *He felt sure* that it was so, and that he would be

able to make terms that the baronet would jump at. What a surprise for his daughter should he be able to tell her at dinner-time that the bargain was concluded, and the accepted suitor would wait on her that evening! What a splendid and victorious wind-up for a day so unfortunately begun! But he kept all these emotions to himself.

"Well, Sir Arthur," he replied placidly, "and what can I do for you?"

"You can help me, Mr. Farthingale, if you will. Lend me five hundred pounds at your own rate of interest, or direct me to some one who can do so."

"And your security of payment?"

"Well, you must take that as you find it. You know what my little principal consists of, and that and my note of hand ought to be sufficient—for a friend."

"Which I trust you consider me, Sir Arthur. Indeed, I am disposed to do a great deal more for you than what you ask. Your disappointment about the fortune—for it *must* have been a disappointment—and the noble way in which you have borne it, have excited my utmost pity and admiration. But doubtless you will have your reward."

"I don't see where it is to come from," returned the baronet *gloomily*, as he thought of his cousin in

possession not only of the money, but of the woman whom he had hoped to call his own.

"Oh, there's no saying!" cried the lawyer, cheerily. "You remember the old adage, Sir Arthur, 'There's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it,' and it's as true of women as it is of money."

"Tell me where to find as good money as I've lost, Farthingale, and I'll leave the women to shift for themselves."

"But suppose they're united. Come, now! why don't you look out for a nice girl with a fortune, and cut out Mr. Vivian altogether."

"Easier said than done! Heiresses don't grow like blackberries on every bush."

"Not Rothschilds, perhaps; but I know of several girls with tidy little fortunes who would be only too pleased to exchange them for the title of 'my lady.'"

"And meanwhile I am being dunned for lack of five hundred pounds. Can you accommodate me, Mr. Farthingale, or can you not?"

"Certainly I can—moreover I will—but, like all money-lenders, I make my conditions. And the first is that I should like to have a little talk with you about your own affairs. Be candid with me, and tell me the truth. Are you really embarrassed?"

"Only to the extent I have mentioned to you. I

have always been a careful man, and lived within my income. I hope Vivian may do the same."

"I doubt it, Sir Arthur! He has married a wife with extravagant ideas. 'Set a beggar on horse-back' and we all know where he rides to. But I beg your pardon! Perhaps I am trespassing on your feelings. The rumour is that you would have made Miss Nettleship into Lady Chasemore had she been agreeable to the change."

Like all mean-spirited men, Sir Arthur felt ashamed of the charge and denied it.

"Rumour lies as usual, Mr. Farthingale. What Mrs. Vivian Chasemore may have wished or thought of, before my cousin appeared on the scene, is another question; but the best proof of my intentions towards her, is that they were never carried out, although there was every opportunity of doing so."

"I am glad to hear you say it, for though the report reached us through Miss Nettleship (and ladies, you know, do sometimes allow their imaginations to run away with them), and it appeared to me most improbable that she should have refused your offer, yet the idea gave a great deal of unnecessary pain in other quarters, and vexed me in proportion."

"In other quarters! I did not know that my

feelings were held of so much consequence by anybody."

"Ah, we are very blind, Sir Arthur, and guess but little of what is going on around us. But I should like to see you married to a nice girl with money. That would be a far better way of getting out of your pecuniary difficulties than appealing to me."

"It would indeed," replied the baronet, sucking his cane and staring vacantly before him, as though he were acquiescing in an idea that would never be carried out.

"A nice girl," repeated the solicitor earnestly, "well educated and well bred—not *too* young, you know—(I believe you are past thirty yourself, Sir Arthur)—with an average amount of brains and good looks, and about—let me see!—about twenty thousand pounds, let us say—in her own right."

"Find her for me, and I'm your man!" cried Sir Arthur, enthusiastically. He had no more notion as he said it, that little Farthingale had a living subject in his mind's eye, than he had that Selina was breaking her heart for him. And the lawyer's sudden change of feature and hearty grip of the hand overpowered him with amazement.

"*Done with you, sir,*" he exclaimed loudly. "If

you're a man of your word, well so am I, and we need waste no more breath upon the matter."

"What do you mean?" said the baronet, drawing back. "I don't understand the joke."

"It's no joke, Sir Arthur! It's real sober earnest. The money's safe in the bank, and the girl's dying for you; and all you've got to do is to name the day and take them both."

"What girl? what money?"

"Why, my daughter Selina, to be sure! Haven't I made that plain enough to you already? She's been soft about you for a long time, Sir Arthur; but to rectify her softness, you shall have twenty thousand pounds down in hard cash upon your wedding-day, and a furnished house beside; and if you can't make that and your title and your profession carry you ahead of your cousin and his wife, why you're not the long-headed fellow I take you for!"

"Marry Miss Farthingale?" exclaimed Sir Arthur, quickly. "Oh, I couldn't do it!"

He had been quite in earnest when he said he should like to marry an heiress, but he had not dreamt of Selina Farthingale as he made the avowal. Say what we will of them, men do not nearly so often sell themselves for filthy lucre as the other half of creation do. They like luxury, doubtless, and a woman loses none of her charms in their eyes from

being rich; but it is only the lowest and most unmanly of their sex who will deliberately relinquish all their dreams of beauty in exchange for wealth. They always want an heiress, but it must be an heiress of their own choosing, endowed with every charm and virtue under the sun—a kind of fabulous creature which they end by never meeting at all. Sir Arthur, fresh from his disappointment of losing Regina Nettleship with her fair stately grace, had no relish for the sallow complexion and angular proportions of Selina Farthingale, and he was perfectly sincere in blurting out the unpalatable truth that he “couldn’t marry her.”

“*Couldn’t do it!*” echoed the father. “Then what on earth have you been driving at all this time?”

“Not at a marriage with your daughter, sir. It was the very furthest thing from my thoughts. Have I ever said or done anything to make you imagine otherwise?”

“No, Sir Arthur, no! not until these last few minutes. But when you told me so plainly that you wanted to marry a girl with money, I thought you must have your eye upon Selina.”

“Indeed, Mr. Farthingale, you do me too much honour. I have never even aspired to the idea. I *am not* worthy of Miss Selina, and even if I were

so, the fact of my not having yet paid her any attention would be a serious bar to our discussing the matter."

"I thought the attentions might come afterwards," said the discomfited lawyer; "however, of course, if you haven't a mind for the girl, it's no use saying any more about it. But you won't let this go any further—will you?"

"You may trust me implicitly. But how about the five hundred pounds?"

"There it is, you see! You might have made it thousands, and welcome, if we could only have arranged this little matter between us. And I thought it would have been a perfect godsend for you, particularly when you think of all the practice I could have put into your hands."

"It would indeed, under other circumstances; but without affection, you see, Mr. Farthingale, even money loses its value. I am sure you must care too much for your charming daughter to wish to risk her happiness."

"Oh, pray say no more about it," replied the other, as he hid his shamed face amongst his papers. "You shall have the sum you require to-morrow, Sir Arthur, if you will bring me the proper securities; and now, as I have a great deal of work on hand, I will bid you 'good-morning.'"

The men shook hands and parted, both wishing heartily that the interview that had just passed had never taken place.

Mr. Farthingale intended to keep it a secret from Selina, but after a few weeks her fretfulness at the baronet's continued absence from their house caused so many dissensions between them, that in a moment of irritation he told her the whole story.

Her rage was terrible! The idea that her father, by what she termed his "meddling interference," had blighted her prospects in life and spoiled the game she had just cleared the course to play made her lose all self-command. She called Mr. Farthingale by every opprobrious epithet she could think of, and so angered him that he made up his mind he had been a fool to devote his life and wealth to her as he had done, and that thenceforth he should be wiser to think more of his own comfort and less of that of his daughter.

So Mr. and Miss Farthingale (after the very serious quarrel that followed Sir Arthur's rejection of the lawyer's overtures) commenced life anew, and under very different auspices. Each took the path that seemed best, without any consideration for the feelings of the other, and the result was an almost total separation. Selina could neither forgive nor *forget* the fatal termination to her father's inter-

ference in her love affairs; nor he, the insolence with which she had greeted his failure.

Gradually but surely, therefore, they drifted apart, to find separate friends, pursuits, and pleasures. And it never entered Miss Selina's clever head to imagine that without her watchful eye to foresee danger, there was a probability of her father drifting into something still worse than separation.

CHAPTER XV.

“’T WAS I GIVE ’IM HUP.”

THE end of autumn was not the most healthy part of the year for Drury Lane, nor the most profitable time for Mrs. Bell's trading. Peaches, nectarines, and grapes were luxuries too costly for the purses of her regular customers; added to which sundry unwelcome visitors, in the shape of diseases engendered by the hot summer and the unripe fruit, were in the habit of visiting Drury Lane and its environs about that period, and making its inhabitants rather shy of all sorts of vegetables. So the little shop did not look its best. The cheap flowers were all over, so was the cheap fruit, and a few handfuls of brown filberts or a bunch of dahlias was all that Mrs. Bell could afford wherewith to decorate her window.

Everything looked melancholy, inside and out, and not a breath of fresh air was to be obtained from the dusty street, which reeked with the smell of decaying refuse, and rang with the cries of fractious, fevered children. .

Bonnie drooped in the inside parlour, and her grandmother moped behind the counter, often wishing she was at rest in the Brompton Cemetery with the two men she had laid to sleep there. When Kit Masters had called on three consecutive days, without receiving any fresh orders, he began to think there must be something very wrong at the little shop in Drury Lane.

"Why, look ye here, Mrs. Bell," he ejaculated, as he removed his fur cap and scratched his head: "this won't do, ye know! What's come over you and the shop that ye don't want nothing again to-day? I've got as fine nuts and apples as you'd wish to see, just fresh out of Kent, and pertaters as fall to pieces on the fork. What on hearth's gone and come to ye that ye don't want 'em?"

"Oh, it's of no use your worryin' me arter that fashion, Kit Masters! I don't want 'em, and that's enough for you! There's no one comes to buy 'em now. What with the dry season and the touch of cholery they've 'ad down 'ere, the bisness has fallen off dreadful. I'm sure I'm quite down like about

it all. There's nigh a sack of them last pertaters left yet. I can't think what the people's livin' on—but not vegetables, I can take my oath of that!"

"That's a bad look-out, Mrs. Bell," replied Kit, scratching his head still more. "It comes of your 'aving a shop, you see. It don't answer all the year round. You should set up a 'orse and cart like mine, and then when your customers don't come to you, you could go to them. Why, it's the greatest trouble to me to keep the vegetables for you till I gets round to this street, I 'ave so many a-clamourin' to let 'em buy!"

"A 'orse and cart!" repeated the old woman, witheringly. "Get along, and don't talk sich rubbish to me. Why, what should *I* do with a 'orse and cart, with my man and 'is son a-moulderin' in their graves? Who'd drive 'em? tell me that! You must be clean daft to talk of sich a thing!"

"Well, ye see, Mrs. Bell, if Bonnie could be brought to see matters in our light, 'twould be the making of you and me, ma'am. I could carry on this consarn with you in a double way, as you may say, and you'd allays have some one to look arter the bisness when you was ill or took! Here's my 'orse and cart—all my own proputtty—and theer's the shop; and what wasn't wanted 'ere, Bonnie and *I could take round and dispose on arterwards.*

'Twould be the fortin of us all, Mrs. Bell, and we might live to ride in our carridge!"

"Aye, so we might, lad! and the gal's a fool not to see it! But theer, she comes of a play-actor, and what can you expect? I might die and rot afore she'd move a 'and to 'elp me?"

This was a very unfair assertion on the part of the old grandmother; but she was selfish, like the rest of us, and fully believed what she said.

She had held many such conversations with Kit Masters, and repeated them to her granddaughter, before the day on which Bonnie groped her painful way homewards, and fell fainting on the floor. The old woman's heart was touched then, and when the girl assured her, with her first command of speech, that she would do as she wished and marry Kit Masters, her heart was touched still more. Her gratitude and delight at the intelligence were so great, that Bonnie would have found no opportunity of retracting, even had she wished to do so. But in truth she was indifferent, or she thought she was.

The bridegroom-elect was cautioned by Mrs. Bell not to be too rough in his wooing, lest he should frighten the girl into withdrawing her consent again; and acting on this advice, he continued *so to behave* himself as not to extort more than an *occasional* fractious objection from Bonnie's lips

when he attempted to play the lover somewhat too warmly.

Her evident indifference and aversion often drew an oath from him; but he consoled himself with the belief—so largely indulged in by men better educated than he was—that marriage would amend all that dissatisfied him in courtship, and that the wife would suddenly blossom forth into something entirely different from the maiden. Why men should deceive themselves with this idea it is difficult to say.

Common sense might teach them that the girl who shrinks intuitively from their embrace is hardly likely to prove a passionate and devoted wife; but everything that displeases them before marriage is set down to maidenly reticence and modesty, which the magic ring is to set right—that ring, alas! which usually proves its magic by showing up two people in their true colours, and binding them fast together, in order that they may be separated for evermore.

The wooing of Christopher Masters and Mary Bell went on in a very prosaic and common-place manner. I believe the chief reason the girl had for consenting to the marriage was the idea of getting away from the close rooms and street that seemed to be stifling her, and driving round the town and into the country in Kit Masters's light spring-cart.

She had several of these drives during the weeks that the banns were being called, and the pleasure of them seemed to put new life into her veins. It is true that she often sighed as they came in sight of the still, deep-flowing river, and wished she lay dead and cold beneath the water; but her sorrow was more a pensive than an active grief, and she was too young really to wish to die. There was no antagonism in her real life, as yet, to make that other and ideal life contrast with it as heaven with hell.

So long as we have our *losses* only to bewail, it is easy to suffer patiently. It is the existent *wrong* that raises the demon within us, and makes the loss seem twice as great beside the hated gain.

So Bonnie journeyed listlessly towards the goal of her life, and heard that the banns had been cried for the third time, and the following Sunday would be her wedding-day, without visible feeling of any sort. There were very different preparations made for this wedding from those that had been required before Miss Regina Nettleship could be married in a manner befitting the granddaughter of the Duke of Mudford. Mrs. Bell, in her delight and gratitude at Bonnie's tardy acquiescence, did insist upon the girl being married in a "real silk gown," which *hung* upon her about as naturally as one of her

morning dresses would have done upon a duchess; but besides that festal attire and a new hat to ride about in his cart with Kit, there was not much alteration made in poor Bonnie's usual wardrobe. Mrs. Bell had no money wherewith to purchase bridal outfits.

When the marriage morning came and the ceremony (through which Bonnie stumbled in a dazed and absent manner, that left an impression on the parson's mind that the bride was either deaf or silly) was completed, the wedding-party, which included Kit's father and mother, sat down in the back parlour of Mrs. Bell's shop to dine off roast pork and greens, and to drink the health of the married couple in gin and water. After which Kit drove them all in his cart to Richmond, where they hired a boat and went up and down the river; and the old people got very merry, and the gallant bridegroom quite intoxicated; and poor Bonnie sat at one end of the boat, shrinking visibly from the endearments of her lord and master, and wondering why people were always so anxious to get married, and if she should ever be so happy again as she was in the old days when she lived alone with her grandmother, and kept the rooms clean for Mr. Alfred Waverley!

Ah, Bonnie, not much need to ask! The veriest

tyro in the history of human nature might have answered you "No."

It had been decided that as Mrs. Bell's house had more accommodation in it than she required, the newly-married couple should take up their abode with her. And Bonnie, frightened when the time came of leaving her grandmother, had clung to this idea with avidity. Mr. Kit Masters, therefore, became the responsible tenant of the rooms which had once been occupied by Alfred Waverley, and the spot in which her first sense of love had been awakened was the scene of Bonnie's honeymoon.

Do the lower classes ever love and mourn and feel in proportion with their higher-born brethren? They have not been reared to think and act delicately, and we all know what the sensitive flower of love is degraded to when it is stripped of refinement. Do any amongst them love with their heads as well as their hearts? I have watched and questioned them closely, in their various joys and trials, and I doubt whether they can either sorrow or rejoice with the same power of feeling as those who have more leisure to devote to a contemplation of themselves.

Had a gentleman fallen in love with Bonnie Bell, he would have invested her with a thousand *attributes* unseen to the common eye and bred of

his own affection. The girl was really pretty and modest, and sweet in voice and manner. Her eye had the pensive tint of the harebell, and her cheek was like a wild rose flushed at the heart. Her supple figure might have supplied a painter's model, and there was a delicacy about her smooth skin and a refinement in the low, dreamy tones of her voice that raised her far above her fellows. There was an elevation also in the mind that could cherish a fancy such as she had conceived for Alfred Waverley, that, well directed and wooed back to its legitimate resting-place, would have transformed the girl into a good and grateful wife, if not a loving one.

But Kit Masters, coarse in breeding and manners, was not the man to effect this. In his eyes, Bonnie was nothing more than any other pretty girl—a trifle less, perhaps, since she was absent and listless, which are bad qualities for the mistress of a working man's home. He thought her a "main good-lookin' lass." She had "took his fancy," as he expressed it, and he didn't see why she shouldn't be as useful a wife as any when she was "stirred-up a bit." But had any one suggested to the costermonger that there were depths of feeling in the heart of his new possession that only needed culture and education to transform the girl into a

poetess or a painter, he would have thought his informant either drunk or mad, and have jeered at the idea as an incomprehensible piece of nonsense. In his eyes, women were animals, either more or less agreeable to view, that had to be coaxed or coerced according to their behaviour.

Bonnie was a woman; *ergo*, Bonnie was an animal, placed in his power and to be treated as his superior judgment directed. This was the style of Kit Masters's reasoning.

As to Bonnie herself, her married life, even in those first days of rough wooing and indulgence, became a horror to her. She flew to her grandmother full of complaints and entreaties for redress; but the old woman naturally assessed her wrongs at the usual worth of matrimonial grievances, and so plainly pointed out to her that she had set her feet on a path from which there was no return, that the poor girl sank into a species of apathetic despair that never afterwards forsook her. She soon became afraid of her husband—afraid of his easily roused passion—his coarse oaths and vituperation—still more of his rough caresses and compliments when he had recovered his temper again. Her greatest pleasure was taken in the daily drives they *had in the spring-cart*, and to be deprived of going *rounds with him* became her greatest punishment.

Never mind how early Kit had to be in Covent Garden market, in order to secure the best and freshest vegetables and fruit, Bonnie was sure to be up and dressed in time to accompany him, and "Masters's pretty wife" was soon as well known amongst the vendors as himself.

She enjoyed seeing the country carts, high piled with cabbages, cauliflowers, lettuces and greens of all descriptions, come rolling in to take up their appointed stand on the market pavement and unload their stacks of goods.

She became interested in choosing the best apples and pears and oranges, and learned so quickly to distinguish between bad and good, that Kit soon left her to make the fruit purchases by herself. She was a different girl here to what she had been in her grandmother's little shop. The life around her, the chaffing and chaffering, roused her languid brain into something like action, and put her on her mettle. But still she was vaguely and restlessly unhappy. When the shop had been supplied for the day, and Kit and she had had their breakfast, they would leave Mrs. Bell to attend to her customers, and wander forth again with a cart full of fruit and vegetables, to visit all the streets where Masters was known, and dealt with on his own account. Some would have considered it very

monotonous and tiring to occupy the wooden seat of the cart all day, sitting still sometimes for half an hour while the costermonger was talking with an old customer and persuading her to buy more than she required. But Bonnie never felt weary. She was straining her eyes all the time to catch sight of a form they longed to gaze on. Every now and then, as they drove round a corner or crossed a street, her head would be jerked backward to regard some passing figure; or, going home in the dark, she would peer in the foot-passengers' faces as though she would devour their lineaments in the gloom. Her moods did not long pass unnoticed by Kit Masters. More than once he asked her gruffly who she was "cocking her eye at, arter that fashion;" and she had shrunk from the question and murmured some unintelligible reply, which had only urged him to order her "not to let him catch her doing it agen." One or two little quarrels had arisen from this circumstance—one or two sullen fits, that is to say, on the part of Mr. Masters, which had resulted in fits of another gender, namely, intoxication. Both Bonnie and her grandmother had been terribly alarmed on these occasions, and the old woman had gone so far as to ask herself if the convenience of the "orse and cart" was worth such a disturbance in her hitherto peaceful household.

But there was nothing to be done but to bear it, as the women weepingly agreed, for there was only one master in the house now, and they were two pitiful trembling slaves. Yet still Bonnie's eyes roved incessantly up and down the London streets in search of Alfred Waverley, and the colour came and went on her cheek, in fitful flushes, if she caught sight of a coat, or an umbrella, or a stick, that she fancied might belong to him.

Kit Masters could not rob her of her one cherished secret hope, but he was very close upon guessing the truth of her normal state of excitement and nervousness, and turning it into no secret at all.

One day, in the beginning of December, when they had been man and wife for about two months, it all came out. It was a bright fresh morning, and Bonnie had been more cheerful and animated than usual. Kit had bought her a cloak to keep her warm whilst driving, and she was grateful for his attention, and had told him so. They had started on their usual round of duty, conversing quite amiably, and the old grandmother had stood at the door and smiled to see them so gay. When, as they drove down the Strand on their way to Westminster, Vivian Chasemore walked suddenly out of a restaurant and stood on the edge of the pavement,

waiting to cross the street until the greengrocer's cart should have passed by. Bonnie's eye fell on him, and in an instant her whole demeanour changed. The words she was about to utter failed upon her tongue—her glance was transfixed to the spot where he stood—her colour came and went with uncontrollable energy, and her whole frame shook as if with the ague. Kit Masters glanced at his wife and then at Vivian Chasemore (whom of course he recognised), and guessed the truth at once. Bonnie was "sweet upon that chap as used to live at her grandmother's." This was the reason of her silence and indifference—of her tears and complaints. This the reason that she stood gazing with all her eyes at the prints that were pasted on the walls of their bedroom, and would allow no hand to wind up the clock their lodger had given her, but her own. His wife was "sweet upon" Mr. Waverley! Werry good! she 'adn't 'eard the last of it, by no manner of means.

Kit only expressed his marital indignation at the moment, by whipping up his unfortunate horse and sending it at a fast trot into Westminster, whilst Bonnie tried to calm down her agitation and appear the same as usual. Vivian Chasemore had not even raised his eyes towards the greengrocer's cart; *but in the brief moment of their meeting Bonnie*

had taken in every detail of his handsome person—had noticed the fashionable garb he wore, and the bronzed and improved appearance of his face and figure. She was very silent after the encounter: she could not be otherwise, for directly she tried to speak something rose in her throat and choked her, and it was with difficulty she could keep back her tears. Her husband was also ominously morose. He only addressed one sentence to her after they had met Vivian Chasemore.

"That 'ere was Mr. Halfred Waverley (as you used to call 'im) as we saw in the Strand, just now, warn't it?" he demanded, on the first occasion of his being obliged to leave the cart.

"Yes," she said, in a low voice.

"Werry good, Mrs. Masters, werry good," he answered ominously, as he gave her a stare out of his little keen eyes. And that was all the communication that took place between them till they reached home again.

By that time, what with the silence and her own thoughts and repressed emotion, Bonnie had grown so nervous and disquieted, that the first thing she did on gaining her room was to burst into tears. Kit, who had followed her upstairs, first turned the key in the door, and then seized her roughly by the arm.

"Now, what's the meanin' of all this?" he commenced angrily. "You'd best tell me at once, for, by the living Jingo! you don't leave this 'ere room till I know. What's the reason that you 'aven't said a blessed word to me all this mornin', and bin a-sittin' as glum as a howl on your seat, and blinkin' your heyes to keep the tears back? What's the meanin' of it, I say?"

"Tain't nothing," replied Bonnie, through her tears.

"That's lie the fust! How many more do ye mean to tell me? Now, I won't 'ave no nonsense, you know! I'm your 'usband, and I've a right to hask what you mean by a-shiverin' and a-shakin' arter that fashion directly you claps your eyes on another feller. Ah! ye think I didn't twig you, I suppose; but I can see through a 'ole in a wall as far as hany man, and I know as plain as if you'd told me with your own mouth that it's that hulking chap Halfred Waverley as you're a blubberin' arter now."

"Oh, don't—don't!" implored Bonnie.

"Don't *what*—ye fool! Don't speak so plain and open to your ladyship, I suppose. Oh, we're mighty innercent and modest, I know! We can't throw a civil word to our 'usband, who keeps us in *board* and lodging like a honest woman, but we can

go a-snivellin' arter a lanky cove that ain't no manner of relation to us, jist because 'e wears a fine coat and 'as got a dimind ring upon 'is finger."

"I tell you it is not so!" cried Bonnie, passionately.

"That's lie the second! I know all your capers just as well as you know 'em yourself, and it's no use trying no dodges with me; and if you do I'll make you pay for it with a rope's end. So now you've heard my mind about it."

"I *hate* you!" said the girl, turning wrathful eyes upon him.

"I dessay you do. That's nothin' noo. Most wives 'ate their 'usbands. It's the fasshun nowadays. But you'd best think twice about tellin' me so. I've found out the reason of your hairs. I 'alf suspected it all along, but to-day has made me sure. You're sweet upon that Halfred Waverley, and you tuk me just because you found you couldn't 'ave 'im. Isn't it now?"

"I shan't tell you! You are cruel to me. It's no business of yours, whether or no," she gasped between her sobs.

"Oh, ain't it no business of mine! We'll soon settle that matter. Anyways I knows it, and now I've got a bit of news for you in return. You was main cut up, warn't you, when that chap was found

out to be a lord or summat, and left your grandmother's lodgings, and you didn't see 'im no more? Well, then, 'twas *I* give 'im up. 'Twas *I* as see the advertisement fust and the reward offered, and went and give 'is description and whereabouts to the lawyers, and set 'em on 'is track, and got fifty pounds down for the information. Warn't that prime? And 'twas mainly on account of that fifty pounds that your grandmother pushed on our marriage; and it's part on it as you wears on your back in the shape of that new cloak. So you see I've 'ad my share out of Mr. Halfred Waverley as well as you, my gal, as it's only fair as I *should* 'ave. And now, what do you say to hall that?"

What she said was to tear the cloak off her shoulders and trample it under her feet. What she said was to turn eyes upon her husband, glaring with fury and impotent revenge, before she cast herself headlong upon the sofa and burst into a storm of passionate tears.

"Oh, that won't be no manner of use!" continued Kit Masters in a bullying tone. "I ain't done with you yet, my lady, nor with Mr. Halfred Waverley neither."

He took the little clock she prized so much up in his hands as he spoke and dashed it on the *ground*, where it was smashed to atoms; then, walk-

ing into the next room, he deliberately tore the painted pictures in ribbons from the wall, and cast them in shreds upon the floor.

"Hanything more of Mr. Halfred Waverley's?" he inquired jocosely as he returned to the sitting-room. "Ha! a picter or two," treading them beneath his heel as he spoke. "And now I think we've pretty well finished with that gentleman and 'is belongings. What do you say, ma'am?" he added, as he sat down by Bonnie on the sofa and leered into her face.

She sprang into a sitting posture and spat at him. The act roused him to fury, and he struck her a violent blow upon the side of the head, which made her sink down to her former position with a low moan.

* * * * *

We have started the various personages of this story upon their separate careers. Some appear already to have lost the game, others to have won. But is there really so much difference after all in the positions which are allotted to each human creature? Is there any joy in this world unmingled with sorrow—any sorrow which has not its modicum of relief? Vivian Chasemore, Regina Nettleship, and Kit Masters have attained the prizes they

aspired to; Sir Arthur, Selina Farthingale, and Bonnie Bell have been worsted in the race.

The little lawyer has quarrelled with his daughter; Lady William is left grumbling alone in her apartments; and Janet Oppenheim has been banished to Clarence Lodge.

No one seems to be in the same position or to entertain the same hopes they did four months before, except it be the greengrocer's old widow, who has learned to look for nothing but the grave.

It is the safest hope for any of us to indulge in, since it is the only one that is certain of realisation.

Still, the men and women of this history have sundry changes yet to undergo before their biographer can lay down the pen that transcribes it, and those who have had the patience to read of them so far, may have the curiosity to pursue their fortunes to the end. Two years and a half will have passed over each of their heads before we meet them again.

CHAPTER XVI.

"SAY AN OLD FRIEND CALLED TO SEE HER."

WHEN Lady William Nettleship had had time to settle down, after the excitement consequent upon her daughter's wedding, and to look her future steadily in the face, she found that she had gained a great deal more than she had lost by the transformation of Miss Regina Nettleship into Mrs. Vivian Chasemore. Five hundred a year is a sorry income on which to keep up an appearance of respectability when one is compelled to meet from it all the outlay attendant on the dressing and taking about of a young and fashionable lady on her promotion. But when it has to be applied only to the wants of an old woman who prefers card-parties and dinners at her neighbour's expense rather than at her own, it will go a considerable distance. And Lady William felt the better for Regina's departure not only in the increased freedom of her purse-strings; a load seemed lifted from her existence when her daughter's *espionage* was removed. She was a very worldly and pleasure-seeking old lady, who loved gambling and late hours, and would stoop to any depth to gain a dinner or a loan. And Regina had restrained her in all this. Regina, who, with her faults of coldness

and pride and love of money, was a true gentlewoman in feeling, had blushed at her mother's proclivities for gaming and painting and placing herself under obligations to people she despised, and had tended by her scornful behaviour to keep many from their doors who would otherwise gladly have entered them. With her marriage the barrier was removed, and it was not long before Lady William was acquainted with half the circle of Mrs. Runnymede's friends, the majority of whom were altogether beneath her in station, whilst that lady herself almost lived in the house. As soon as Lady William had exhausted the topic of Regina's wealth and luxuries and ingratitude, she began to consider—having quite made up her mind that Vivian Chasemore should defray the expenses of the wedding trousseau and breakfast on his return—whether she could not better her condition by seeking other lodgings than those she occupied. Upon which Mrs. Runnymede proposed that they should set up house together. Mrs. Runnymede had a charming little villa in Kensington, which, with the furniture it contained, was all her own; none of her friends knew how she had come by it, any more than they knew whence she derived the money on which she contrived to live so comfortably; nor did she vouchsafe to enlighten *them* upon either matter. The fact, however, re-

mained, and when she offered to let her dear Lady William share her humble *ménage*, the bereaved mother consented to do so at once. She knew a little of the style in which Mrs. Runnymede lived; of the snug little card-parties she held which no one dreamed of breaking up before the small hours had arrived; of the free and easy way in which people walked in and out of her house and she of theirs; of the delicate dinners she gave her friends, and the generosity with which the wine was circulated at them, and decided it was just the sort of life that would suit her best. There was no daughter now to try and keep up the proprieties, and frown her down when she was going too far, or mercilessly remind her of the hour every time the clock struck. Old Lady William felt like a girl suddenly released from school discipline, as she recognised the delightful position Regina's marriage had placed her in, and by the time the Vivian Chasemores returned from their wedding trip, they found her permanently installed as an inmate of Mrs. Runnymede's house.

The circumstance disgusted Regina, and considerably annoyed her husband. Few people about town were unacquainted with the character borne by the widow of Kensington, and her social propensities rendered her most unfit to be the hostess of such a woman as Lady William Nettleship. Regina

declared from the first that no power should induce her to set her foot in the house, nor to receive her mother at her own, unless she came unaccompanied by Mrs. Runnymede. And to this determination she had religiously adhered. It had no effect, however, in inducing Lady William to seek another house. The wicked old woman was only too delighted with the existence she was leading. To be able to gamble and rouge and talk scandal to her heart's content, and to make what acquaintances and keep what hours she chose, was heaven to her, after the somewhat domineering rule to which she had been so long subjected.

Mrs. Vivian Chasemore's remonstrances and refusal to visit her only formed a fresh grievance wherewith to entertain her friends. Her daughter's hard-heartedness and ingratitude and pride were copious subjects for dilation, and many of her hearers were really persuaded that Lady William Nettleship was a very injured and long-suffering mother. She did not refuse to go to her daughter's house: on the contrary, she appeared there much oftener than Reginald desired, though the pride of blood forbade her letting strangers see that she was ashamed of her own mother. A serious difference, however, occurred between them on the occasion of *Lady William* pleading her poverty to Vivian Chase-

more, as an excuse for asking him to defray the wedding expenses.

"This is degrading," cried Regina with flashing eyes, as soon as the two women found themselves alone. "You know, mamma, that you would be perfectly able to pay those bills if you would only exercise a little self-denial. I wonder you could stoop to ask Vivian such a favour. I would have gone upon dry bread and water for a twelvemonth first."

"Really, Regina, one would think you were talking of a stranger. I should like to know who has a better right to pay these bills than your husband? A man can't expect to marry the granddaughter of a duke for nothing. And rolling in wealth as you are too! I think it is *you* who ought to be ashamed of yourself. You would let your poor mother scrape and save to defray the expenses of a marriage that has given you luxuries that she has never dreamt of possessing."

"It is so unusual—so unheard-of a demand," continued Regina. "It is sending me like a beggar to his arms. You might have been contented to know that I shall be no further expense to you, and at least have spared me this."

"Oh! if you are going to make such a ridiculous fuss over a trifle, my dear, I shall take my depar-

ture. It is only five hundred pounds, and you have as many thousands. However, let us say no more about it! I ought to have been prepared to meet with insult and ingratitude at your hands!"

"I would rather have been married in a print dress than have been subjected to this humiliation," repeated her daughter.

"Oh yes! that is all very fine in theory, but it would have looked well in practice, would it not, for the granddaughter of Lord Mudford to have had a trousseau like a housemaid? However, we are not likely to agree upon the subject, Regina, and therefore I shall leave you to think it over by yourself."

Vivian, however, could not allow the matter to rest there, and before long a cheque for the amount due found its way from his hands to those of his mother-in-law, and he often thought afterwards that the estrangement which the transaction made between the mother and daughter had been cheaply paid for.

Lady William Nettleship, when we meet her two years and a half afterwards, had not entirely given up calling at Regina's house; but she went there so seldom that they were very little troubled by her company. She had quite relinquished the *undesirable habit* of popping in at all times, whether

they had friends or were alone; neither did she intrigue to procure invitations to the houses at which they visited, where she might glorify their relationship by expatiating on the attractions and virtues of her daughter and son-in-law to all who would listen to her. On the contrary, she kept rather closely to the villa in Kensington, where she and Mrs. Runnymede entertained all sorts of people—good, bad, and indifferent, any one in fact who would accept their hospitality on their own conditions, or were too ignorant of the reputation in which their parties were held to be prudent enough to refuse it. Several of the old set mixed with them still, attracted by Lady William's title or Mrs. Runnymede's excellent housekeeping, and amongst them were the Macdougals of Macdougals, Mr. and Mrs. Stingo, and Selina Farthingale.

It is easy to guess what drew these people thither. The Macdougals, like Lady William herself, had ever been famous for condescending to eat a dinner or a supper *anywhere*, so long as she had not to pay for it. The Stingoes, who were still struggling to attain a position superior to their birth and still failing to attain it, could not afford to drop the acquaintanceship of *one* title, however small: and Miss Farthingale, whose home at this present moment was more lonely and dull than it had ever

been before, was eager to preserve a footing in any house which entertained male visitors. And though the gentlemen who frequented Mrs. Runnymede's card-parties were not as a rule the youngest or gayest of their sex, there was no knowing when a stray son or nephew might be induced to accompany them, nor what chances of a settlement might not be lost by non-attendance.

It was in March, therefore, more than two years after Regina's wedding, that a little group of ladies were gathered in the drawing-room of the Kensington villa, anxiously awaiting the advent of the men, who came not.

The weather was bitterly cold, and Lady William looked blue even through her rouge, as she drew nearer to the fire and held Selina Farthingale's hand between her own for the sake of the warmth she derived from it.

"I am afraid we shall have no party to-night, Runnymede!" she remarked to the other partner in the firm. "Selina says it is snowing fast, and she had the greatest difficulty in getting a cab."

"It must be inches thick already, Mrs. Runnymede," chimed in Selina, "and it's freezing into the bargain. I wouldn't have stirred from home myself for anybody but you and dear Lady William."

"Well, my dear, if the men don't come, we must

do without them, and have a rubber by ourselves. There are five of us, you see, with Mrs. Macdougall and Mrs. Stingo, so we shall manage nicely. But we won't give them up just yet. I should think General Playfair and Sir Cunningham Morse were sure to come. And what about your papa, Selina?" said Mrs. Runnymede, who was already very watery about the eyes, though it was but eight o'clock in the evening.

"Oh! I know nothing of papa," exclaimed Miss Farthingale, tossing her head. "I see less of him every day I live. He's got some friends of his own, I suppose; any way he tells me nothing about them, though I believe he spends half his time there!"

"What a pity! Such a clever man too, and so fascinating! Just the person calculated to make a happy home. And then to throw himself away upon strangers. It must make you very uneasy, dear."

"I don't trouble myself much about the matter. I think papa is a very overrated man. He may be smart in his profession, but he gives me very little of his cleverness at home," retorted Selina, who retained a vivid impression of what "papa" had effected by meddling in her matrimonial affairs.

"Have you been to Premier Street?" inquired Lady William; Premier Street being one of those fashionable thoroughfares that intersect Portland Place

and the locality in which Vivian Chasemore had settled down with his wife.

"No. Have they returned home yet?"

"Yes; nearly a week ago! Regina says she was so tired of Nice, but she had better have stayed a little longer. She feels the cold bitterly here."

"She must indeed! How is she in health?"

"I think her looking delicate, but you know Regina's way! She will never allow that she is ill. And Mr. Chasemore seems perfectly easy about her."

"Ah! that's not saying much. Husbands usually are!"

"I was there this afternoon," continued Lady William, "but I did not stay long, as they were in such confusion. A number of cases had just come up from the Customhouse, filled with curiosities that Mr. Chasemore has brought from abroad. He seems to be very extravagantly inclined. And then, who should arrive in the middle of it all but his cousin Sir Arthur!"

"Sir Arthur!" repeated Selina, with a start.

"Yes; the first time they have seen him for a twelvemonth. He has been to Madeira and the Cape and Algiers, and Heaven knows where beside. I thought there was never much love lost between the cousins since my daughter refused the baronet *but they seemed quite pleased to meet.* And Sir

Arthur is to be their guest, I understand, until his chambers are vacant again."

Selina Farthingale became quite fluttered. She had long ceased to mourn over the baronet's delinquency, for three years is a severe trial of constancy for a fancy that was never founded upon faith; but the remembrance of his rejection of her proffered hand had still the power to sting her, and if she retained one strong feeling in respect to him, it was the desire to be revenged for his indifference.

"Sir Arthur staying in Premier Street!" she observed in a voice that trembled, spite of all her pains to prevent it. "Come to look after his property, I suppose, and to see that it is properly cared for."

"His property, dear! What do you mean?"

"Why, it will be his, won't it, if Mrs. Vivian Chasemore has no children? Are there any prospects, Lady William?"

"Not yet, I am sorry to say. Of course I did not like to mention so delicate a subject, but I fancy that my daughter's mind has a great deal to do with her health. She frets and fidgets, you know, and naturally too, for I can see that Mr. Chasemore is beginning to feel fidgety also."

"That's the worst of entailed property, isn't it?" remarked Miss Farthingale. "It's a great comfort to

have it in one's own hands, as papa has his. Poor Regina! I'm sure I hope to goodness her wishes will be realised, if only to keep Sir Arthur out of the money. He's so grasping and jealous, it would just serve him right!"

"Ah, my dear, we must make allowances for him; it's only natural the poor young man should feel his position. His cousin has cut him out in everything! You used to speak much more kindly of Sir Arthur in olden days, if I remember rightly."

"Used I? Then it was more than he deserved, for he behaved very badly to papa not long afterwards."

"Behaved badly to your papa, did he? I wonder if that had anything to do with his leaving England? He didn't wait, you know, till the Vivian Chases had returned from their honeymoon. By the way, what has become of that sly-looking girl that was living with you at that time—Miss Oppenheim?"

"Oh! the ungrateful minx! Papa got her a most desirable home with a friend of ours, and went to a great deal of expense to settle her there, and she has never written us a line of thanks since her departure. Isn't it mean? I hate ingratitude. It makes one think so poorly of human nature."

"*Ah, it does indeed!*" responded Lady William,

with a sigh dedicated to the remembrance of her daughter. "But you intend to call on Regina, I suppose? I am sure she will be delighted to see you. She is very lonely, you know. He is so much away at his club and societies."

"Of course I shall call! Though she must have everything money can procure to amuse and distract her."

"You are right there, my dear! And she loves it too well—a great deal too well! She showed me a set of furs to-day that must have cost her several hundred pounds! And I am wearing my old cloak for the third winter. Such incongruities as there are in this world!"

"What can ye want mair, Leddy Weelliam?" interposed the cracked voice of the Macdougall, who usually sported an old Scotch woollen shawl that had seen the wear of ten winters; "it's a varra gude cloak that ye wear, and must have cost a pratty bawbee in its day. The warld seems to me to go daft after clothes that are made to be thrawn away before they show the least seegn of age."

"Ah, Mrs. Macdougall, it is not everybody that can afford to dress as plainly as you do. No one needs to be told who Mrs. Macdougall is."

"You're richt there, my led dy. A Macdougall of Macdougall couldn't drap his clansheep if he walked

down Regent Street in a sack. It's the bluid think of—not the silks and satins. Still, a' t doesna amend your daughter's ingratitude. I might weel share some of her bawbees with ye, ye're not over-reech, as we all know."

"Pray let us drop the subject! It is a v painful one," returned Lady William Nettleship; a indeed, at that moment the entrance of a man v had braved the weather turned all the lad thoughts in a pleasanter direction.

Miss Farthingale took an early opportunity call in Premier Street, for she longed to meet Arthur Chasemore face to face, and let him see l little she cared for the circumstance that had se rated them. As she came in sight of the doo Regina's house, she perceived that the step was ready occupied by a visitor—a lady like herself—whom the door was opened just as she gained spot. Selina stood on the lower step, and liste to the colloquy that ensued between the man-serv and the stranger.

"Is Mrs. Vivian Chasemore at home?"

"No, madam! she is not."

"Oh, indeed! I am unfortunate. How long she been gone?"

"About half an hour."

"*Where has she gone to?*"

"I do not know, madam."

"Will she be at home to-morrow morning?"

"That I cannot tell you."

"Oh, very well! then I must take my chance another time," said the lady, turning away.

"Will you not leave your name, madam?" inquired the servant.

The stranger hesitated and coloured. Then she said, in a shuffling manner:

"No, it is not worth while! It is so long since we met, I dare say Mrs. Vivian Chasemore will have forgotten my name. Say an old friend called to see her, and will call again in a day or two. That is all: good-morning;" and the lady, turning sharply round, came full in view of Selina Farthingale as she descended the steps. The conversation she had held was such an unusual one that Selina could not help regarding her with some curiosity. She was a woman of forty-five or fifty years of age—full blown, like Mrs. Runnymede, but much handsomer, and with an amount of rouge and pearl powder on her face that was plainly visible through her spotted veil. She had dyed hair also, and altogether bore a meretricious appearance that was far from taking or lady-like. Selina Farthingale wondered who this "old friend" of Regina's might be, but the footman was waiting for her to speak before he closed the door.

"I have just heard you say that Mrs. Chasemore is not at home, so I will leave my card," she said; and then, as she drew it from her card-case, added, "Can you tell me if Mrs. Chasemore intends to renew her Tuesday 'At Home' this season?"

"I am not sure, madam; but I can inquire of her maid if you desire it."

"Yes, I should like to know, as it makes one sure of finding her at home."

She passed into the hall as she spoke, and the man closed the door behind her.

"Will you step this way, madam?" he said, throwing open the door of a magnificent drawing-room.

"No, thank you! I will remain here! Just ask the question for me, and give me the answer."

The servant demurred for a minute, but finally rang an upstairs bell, and left her in order to consult the lady's-maid upon the landing. Selina glanced round the hall, which was lighted by stained glass and ornamented with specimens of heraldry and the stuffed heads of animals. She was thinking how handsomely it was fitted up, when her eye fell upon a finely carved oak buffet that stood at the end of it, and on which were laid five or six letters, ready for their owners to claim as they re-entered the *house*. Her quick sight detected the name of Sir

Arthur on one of them in a moment, and with feminine curiosity she crossed the hall to examine the envelope. It was directed in a scratchy female hand, which she immediately recognised as that of Miss Janet Oppenheim. Yes, there it was, addressed in full to

“Sir Arthur Chasemore, Bart.,
C/o Vivian Chasemore, Esq.,
3, Premier Street,
Portland Place W.,”

and with the postmark of St. John's Wood in the corner. Selina's eyes flashed with indignation. The man had not been two days in England, and that artful little minx had actually found him out and pounced upon him. But Sir Arthur should not get *this* letter, at all events! She was determined of that. The footman was still whispering with the lady's-maid upon the landing, though even at that moment Selina could detect the rustling of skirts about to descend the staircase. Before they had swept over half a dozen rods, however, the letter was safe in her pocket, and she was standing demurely on the door-mat where the footman had left her, waiting for an answer to her inquiry.

“Mrs. Chasemore have not yet decided, madam, I believe, on renewing her ‘At ‘Omes;’” said the

simpering lady's-maid, "as her 'ealth is not so strong as we could wish for; but if she makes up her mind, as the season advances, to 'ave them, the cards will be sent out as usual to her friends."

"Oh, thank you! Yes, of course! That is all I wished to know," replied Miss Farthingale, anxious to get out of the house again before the man-servant should detect (if he ever would detect) the absence of the purloined letter which she had secured in the depths of her pocket. But the door was opened, and she regained the street in safety.



END OF VOL. I.

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 1875.

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL BY FLORENCE MARRYAT.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT.

(MRS. FRANCIS LEAN.)

AUTHOR OF "LOVE'S CONFLICT," "A BROKEN BLOSSOM," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II

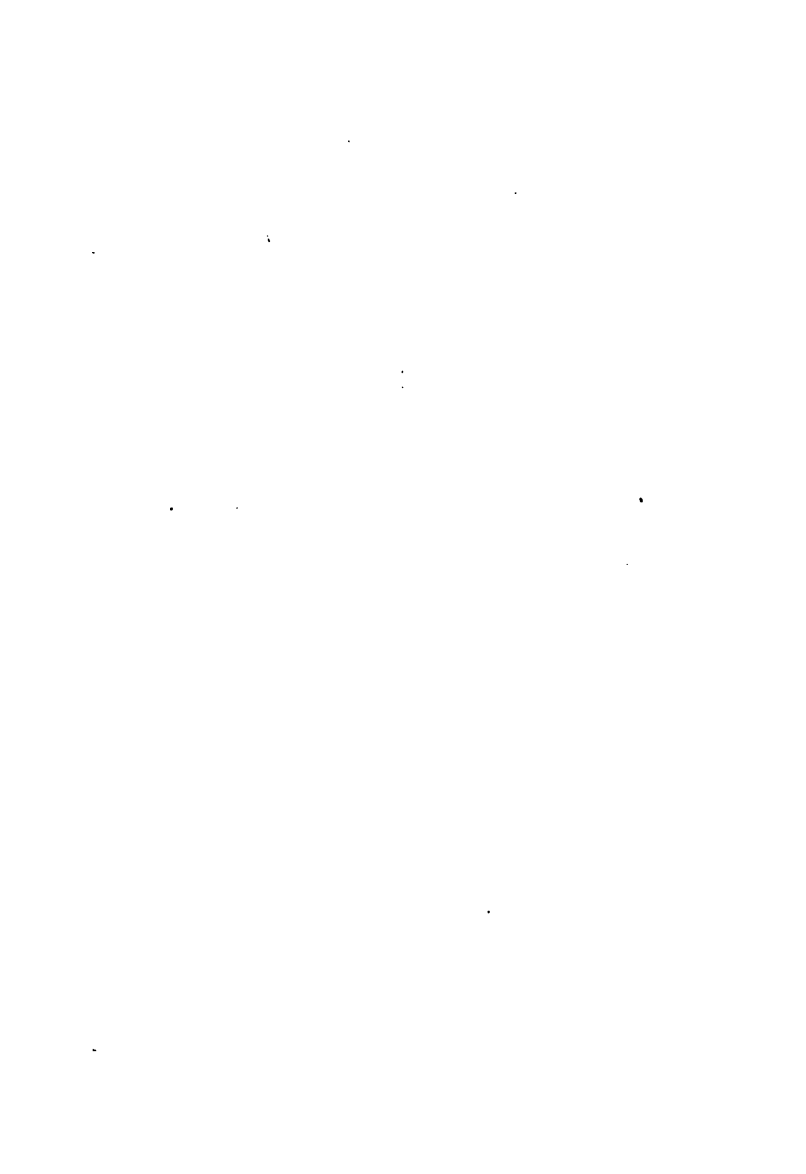


LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1880.

The Right of Translation is reserved.



CONTENTS

OF VOLUME II.

	Page
CHAPTER I. "You have a Son to inherit, I believe" . . .	7
— II. "You have killed the best Part in me" . . .	28
— III. "Indeed you had better send for a Doctor" . . .	45
— IV. "Alone with him! I cannot bear it" . . .	64
— V. "You must pass it off as your own" . . .	83
— VI. "Can we hold our Tongues?" . . .	102
— VII. "I'd better bring it arter Dark" . . .	122
— VIII. "And now where is my Boy?" . . .	145
— IX. "You are the most wonderful Woman in the World!" . . .	163
— X. "I can't help crying for my Baby" . . .	181
— XI. "No likeness in him to either of them" . . .	204
— XII. "She leaves England the Day after to-morrow" . . .	225
— XIII. "Oh! Vivian, I did it for your Sake!" . . .	245
— XIV. "I am glad you loved him" . . .	265

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL.

CHAPTER I.

"YOU HAVE A SON TO INHERIT, I BELIEVE."

As Mrs. Vivian Chasemore's carriage, with its handsome horses and well-appointed servants, drove up to the door of the house in Premier Street on that afternoon in March, and, clad in the sables that had excited her mother's envy, she languidly descended from it, you would have thought she had been used to such luxuries all her life, and had become quite indifferent to their possession. But that was very far from being the case. It is true that she let the costly velvet dress she wore trail up the steps and through the hall, and that she never even cast a glance towards the stands of exotic flowers that filled the house with so sweet a perfume, nor on the marble Mercury that graced the staircase, although it called forth the rapturous admiration of all her friends. Two years and a half had accustomed her to the

idea that all these luxuries were hers by right, but she did not value the position they placed her in the less, because she had ceased to care for themselves. Her maid was waiting at the foot of the staircase to relieve her of her cloak and furs, and then Regina passed into the drawing-room, where the footman followed her to lower the blinds and light the gas. She found Vivian sitting there in the dusk: not reading, but reclining in an arm-chair by the fire, with his eyes fixed upon the flickering flame.

"How lazy you look," was all that she remarked, as she threw herself into the opposite seat. "I cannot imagine how people can waste their time when there is so much to do in the world. Where's Sir Arthur?"

"Not knowing, can't say!" yawned Vivian, who did not appear in the least inclined to defend himself against her accusation of laziness.

She turned from him with a gesture of impatience.

"Anybody called this afternoon, James?" she inquired of the servant.

"Miss Farthingale called, madam, and Mrs. Dampier, and Colonel Payton, and a lady who wouldn't leave her name."

"Wouldn't leave her name! How very strange! *What was she like?*"

"She was a stout lady, madam, dressed in black—with—with—a fresh colour and light yellowish sort of hair!"

At this description Vivian appeared to rouse himself.

"I don't know her," said Regina. "I can't think who it can have been."

"She said I was to tell you an old friend had called, madam, and that she would take her chance of finding you at home another day."

"Some begging petition, you may be sure," exclaimed Vivian. "Did she walk lame, James?"

"Well, sir, now you come to speak of it, I think the lady *did* limp a little as she went down the steps."

"I know the person; a regular begging impostor. If ever she presumes to call here again, say you told Mrs. Chasemore of her visit, and she forbade you to admit her. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir," replied the servant, as he left the room.

Regina did not like such a summary order being given in her name. As soon as ever the man had disappeared she attacked her husband.

"I must say it is rather cool of you, Vivian, deciding who shall and who shall not be admitted

to my presence, without the slightest reference to me. How do you know but what I wish to see this woman and hear what she has to say for myself?"

"I know nothing about it, Regina; but I am quite sure I shall not allow you to do so. I recognise the person from the description, and she is not one I wish you to know."

"This becomes mysterious! Are you afraid she may be able to tell me *too much*?"

"Not at all, my dear. You know that before I married you I unburdened my conscience of all that it was necessary for you to hear of my former life, and that since that time I have been wholly and solely yours in thought, word, and deed!"

"Ah! so you *say*!"

"Regina!" ejaculated Vivian, in a tone of reproach; "have I ever deceived you?"

"I really don't know! Some people say that everything is fair in love or war. And here we have not been in London a fortnight before a mysterious female calls to see me, who won't leave her name, and whom you are evidently most anxious to prevent my meeting."

She spoke so coldly that Vivian felt annoyed. *He loved his wife very dearly still, and her want of*

sympathy with all he did and said was the sorrow of his life.

"You are quite right, Regina," he answered, with a sigh. "I am *most* anxious to prevent your becoming acquainted with that person, though not for the motive you ascribe to me. I should have wished to keep both her name and her existence a secret from you, as I do not consider she is fit to be mentioned even in your presence; but, since you are so unjust, I will tell you in self-defence that I feel certain your mysterious visitor is no other than my step-mother — my poor father's widow. Now, are you satisfied?"

"With what?"

"My determination to exclude her from this house."

"I really don't see why you should do so," replied Regina, as she played with the strings of her bonnet.

"You don't see that I have good reasons for forbidding you to make the acquaintance of that woman, when I have told you of her depraved and vicious habits, and that it was in consequence of her base conduct towards myself that I ran away from my father's house and went on the stage? Regina! you are trying me too far. Remember that I do not take a jest well."

"Oh, you need not remind me of that, Vivian. Every one knows how touchy you can be when you are contradicted. But if I think a thing is wrong, I must say so. It will seem very strange to the world that your father's widow is not admitted to your house, and especially after the company you have been in the habit of keeping."

"What company?"

"Why, actors and actresses and all the sorts of low people you meet on the stage. You can ask a person like Mr. Selwyn to stay under the same roof with me, yet you forbid me to speak to your own father's wife."

"Everard Selwyn is a gentleman by birth and breeding, and this woman is not a gentlewoman. Even if she were, her degrading habits unfit her for the society of her own class. I am astonished at her impudence in calling here. You see that she dared not leave her name, for fear it should reach my ears. She knows what sort of a reception she would get from me. She sought an interview with me, Regina, before we went abroad, and I told her then, as plainly as I could speak, that she should never cross the threshold of any house which held my wife. And I mean to stick to my word."

"Well, I advise you not to tell any one about it *but myself*, Vivian. Some wives might be made

suspicious by so much caution, and begin to fancy there was more than a stern sense of virtue behind it all."

"Are you suspicious, Regina?"

"I?" with a careless laugh. "No, indeed! I am not jealous of you, Vivian, if you imagine that."

"I never thought it, my dear. You are not fond enough of me to be jealous. But you are very much disposed just now to be rebellious."

"Neither one nor the other! What is Mrs. General Chasemore to me? I think only of what the world will say."

"I should think it ought to be quite sufficient excuse to the world, that it was through her double dealing that I was cast upon it to make my way as I best could."

"The less said about that the better, Vivian. I wish you would never allude to the circumstance."

"I know you have no sympathy for what I went through."

"It is hardly to be expected I should. If you had chosen any decent and respectable calling, it might be different; but to think that her husband has been a low, common actor cannot be very pleasant to any woman's feelings."

"I was never low nor common, Regina! And at all events you didn't find me so much so as to prevent your becoming my wife."

"I don't deny that you might have been worse, or that you have improved since our marriage. But you will allow that the stage is not the calling for a man of your birth," rejoined Regina, as she gathered up her draperies and swept from the apartment.

Vivian looked after her and sighed. She had not said anything, perhaps, that was positively unkind or defiant, but she had uttered each sentence in a cold and indifferent manner, which proved too plainly, at least to his warm heart, that yearned for sympathy and affection, that she had none for him. Won by her beauty and grace, he had fondly hoped that her mind and spirit would prove equal to the charms of her person, and for many months after their marriage he had tried to impart life to the statue he had purchased for fifty thousand pounds. But when the first excitement at her success was over, and Regina had had time to settle down to the wonderful conviction that all the ills and annoyances of poverty were past, and she was a rich woman, her husband found to his dismay that she grew less cordial and more self-absorbed every day. *Men cannot go on enthusiastically embracing a*

piece of marble for ever. They need some small return in order to keep their raptures alive. And Regina was one of those women who hate kissing, and say so openly. Vivian's warm lips never got more than a cheek presented to them, and under any excess of ardour Regina was sure to express impatience and dislike. So that, little by little, the endearments which are the very life of conjugal love had died away, and Mr. and Mrs. Vivian Chasemore were beginning to live with each other (as so many thousands of married wretches do) on terms of amiable acquaintanceship. She went her separate way, making her own friends, engagements, and purchases, without the slightest reference to her husband; whilst Vivian, in like manner, having been too often offended by returning to the house to find his wife had left it, came home or stayed out as fancy dictated to him, feeling quite sure that no one would be made anxious by his absence, or delay dinner ten minutes in anticipation of his return.

Few quarrels had ever taken place between them, for Regina was too elegant to use strong language or strong actions, like that poor untutored little savage Bonnie Masters; and Vivian, after a few loving reproaches that entirely failed in their purpose, was too proud not to hide his disappoint-

ment in the depths of his heart. He still admired his wife more than any woman he had ever seen, and he still felt that the old passionate love needed but a look on her part to return in full force upon him; but he had ceased to give expression to either feeling. One mutual desire alone possessed them, and that they never mentioned to each other: the ardent wish for progeny. Vivian desired it from a much purer motive than his wife did. He thought that maternity might develop all the good which he fondly believed to be latent in Regina's character; that the possession of a child would draw their hearts together in the sacred link of father and mother, and give them something to live for and hope for in the future.

Regina's desire was founded on a lower basis. She could not help remembering the terms of Sir Peregrine Chasemore's will, and that, if Vivian died without an heir, the whole of the property would pass to Sir Arthur, and she would be left penniless as she was before her marriage. Her husband had wished, and wished still, to persuade her to live more within their income, in order that he might lay by some of the interest to form a fund for her possible widowhood; but she would not permit him to do so, and all he had been able to accomplish *was to insure* his life heavily in her behalf. Young,

strong, and healthy, he probably thought little of the chance of death that lay before him, but she never forgot it. Night and day the question was before her, "What should she do were she left widowed and childless?" and, as Lady William had shrewdly observed, the intense longing for an heir was having the worst effect upon her health and spirits. She resented her disappointment, also, by a peevish and irritable manner towards her husband, who had had the very first advice on her condition, and carried her to Nice and various other places, in hopes of making her stronger. Yet here they were back in London again, with Regina as languid as ever, and no apparent chance of the ardently wished-for baby. This little failure in her matrimonial speculation made Mrs. Vivian Chasemore almost rude in her behaviour to Sir Arthur. She had never had more than a passing fancy for that gentleman, founded on his title and prospective fortune, and since her marriage with his cousin, their relations had been so distant that she considered it a gross liberty on the baronet's part to establish himself in their house on his return from Algiers, as if it were his natural home.

She believed he had invited himself for the sole motive of spying out "how the land lay," and she resented his presumption in consequence. She was

barely civil to him—a mood on her part which seemed rather to amuse Sir Arthur than to affront him, and for which warm-hearted and hospitable Vivian amply made up by the genuine welcome he accorded to his cousin. The family party at this time was also increased by the addition of Mr. Everard Selwyn, Vivian's old friend, whom he had persuaded to take a holiday to help him get over one of the duller months in London. The three men were merry enough at the dinner that succeeded the conversation I have related, and, before the meal was concluded, had agreed to spend the rest of the evening at the theatre, for which Regina heard them take their departure as she sat in solitary state in her drawing-room, sipping a cup of coffee. No loving husband ran in for five minutes to give her a farewell kiss and smile before he left the house with his friends. Vivian would have done it a year ago, but Regina had so often called him "childish and silly" for asking for or giving such a token of affection, that he had discontinued the practice. She felt a little lonely as the hall-door was shut upon them, but she tried to persuade herself that the house was much pleasanter and quieter without their presence.

Then she pondered awhile on the strangeness of *Mrs. General Chasemore's* visit, and thought she

should like to hear what the lady had to say for herself, and finally she rang the bell and desired the footman to send her maid to her. Mrs. Perkins appeared. She was a young woman of not more than Regina's own age, who had never been Mrs. Perkins nor Mrs. Anybody Else, but had adopted the matronly prefix to her name because it made the "low menials in the servants' 'all," as she denominated them, "more mindful of her position."

"Perkins!" commenced Regina, "did you see the lady who called this afternoon and refused to leave her name?"

"No, ma'am, I didn't! James he called me down to speak with Miss Farthingale, but the other lady was gone by that time."

"Mr. Chasemore gave James an order not to admit her if she comes again. He thinks she is some begging letter-writer, who will worry me for money. Gentlemen don't understand these things, you know. But I wish to speak to her in case she requires relief, and when she calls, if your master should be out, see that she is shown up to my private room. Do you understand me?"

"Oh yes, ma'am, certainly—if you will make it right with James, ma'am."

"No! I don't want to be bothered with James. It is your business to 'make it right,' as you ex-

press it, with him. You have your orders, and all you have to do is to obey them."

"Yes, ma'am—certainly, ma'am. If the master should be *out*, you say?" repeated Mrs. Perkins, rolling up her apron-strings.

"Just so! If the master should be out, of course! I don't want him to be knocking up against this person when he has just said she is not to be admitted. You are growing stupid, Perkins! You will have to brighten up a little, or you will compel me to fill your place with a more competent person."

"Oh no, ma'am, I hope not. I always do my best to please you, ma'am, and I should be very sorry not to give you satisfaction. I will see that your orders are attended to, ma'am," exclaimed the obsequious Perkins, as she curtsied herself out of the room.

But not without a pang at being pledged to deceive the bright-eyed, gay-tempered master!

Vivian was twice as popular in the servants' hall as his beautiful wife. But a mistress is paramount in her own household, and every menial knows *who* holds the reins of government. In consequence therefore of this stratagem, and in spite of James's and Perkins's fears, it was announced to Regina, some five or six days afterwards, that the lady who *had refused* to give her name had called again, and

was at that moment awaiting her presence in the boudoir, where Mrs. Vivian Chasemore went with all haste to greet her.

The boudoir was a fanciful little room which Vivian had fitted up with all sorts of treasures for the reception of his bride, and when Regina entered it on the present occasion, she found the stout lady, who has been already described, busily employed in examining a rare bit of china through her double eyeglass.

"Mrs. Vivian Chasemore, I presume!" said the stranger, as she turned at the opening of the door and confronted Regina; and then the latter perceived that she had a slight halt in her walk, as though one hip was weak or had been injured. "I must introduce myself," she continued, as Regina bowed in acquiescence to her remark; "though it seems hard, Mrs. Vivian, that I should have to do so. I am Mrs. Chasemore, the widow of the late General Chasemore, and your husband's step-mother. But perhaps you have never even been informed of my existence."

"Oh yes, I have!" replied Regina, as she motioned her visitor to a chair.

This rouged and dyed and whitened woman was the very last sort of person to take her fancy or engage her interest, and yet she had a curiosity to

learn what brought her there which would not be balked.

"Indeed! I hardly thought that Vivian would have had the grace to mention my name to you. Ah! my dear, he has not been a good step-son to me, though you may not like to hear it, and his poor father was actually hurried into his grave by his undutiful conduct."

"I am very sorry," faltered the wife, who hardly knew what to reply to such an accusation. "Do you mean by his going on the stage, Mrs. Chase-more?"

"Partly! And there was a shocking thing for a man of his birth and education to do, leaving such a home as he had too, replete with every comfort and luxury, to wallow in the mire of social life! It was the General's death-blow—positively and truly his death-blow!"

"I quite agree with you that it was a shocking thing," said Regina, gravely. "Indeed, we never speak of it, the reminiscence is so painful."

"Ah! you feel it too! I thought you would, reared in the refinement of aristocratic society; but I suppose Vivian bears your animadversions on the subject better than he used to do mine."

"I am afraid not. He has still a great hanker-

ing after his stage friends, and will not hear a word against them."

"Well, it is a mercy his grandfather's eccentric will came in force to save him from such a gulf. He is quite a brand plucked from the burning. He will be more careful in choosing his acquaintance now, it is to be hoped, for your sake and that of his family. You have a son to inherit, I believe?"

"No, I have not," replied Regina, with a deeper shade over her beautiful face.

"What a pity! and when every alley swarms with dirty brats! However, let us hope for the best. I never had much love for the new baronet. A self-sufficient, conceited, money-grasping cad!"

"Hard terms," said Mrs. Vivian, smiling.

"Nothing could be too hard for Sir Arthur, my dear, in my opinion, and I'd do a great deal to strip him of his title. But we must manage to keep him out of the money. I'm afraid it's entailed."

"Yes."

"Ah! so old Farthingale told me. It is just like Sir Peregrine. He never could do a kind thing without some condition that rendered it worthless. Does your husband know that I'm here?" continued Mrs. Chasemore suddenly, as she turned round upon Regina.

To this question the other woman did not know

what to reply, and in her confusion blurted out the truth.

"To be plain with you, he does not. He was angry when he found out from the servant's description that you had called last week, and gave orders you were not to be admitted. But I thought you might have something of consequence to say to me, and so I ventured privately to countermand his order. Still, I would rather Vivian did not hear of your visit to-day."

Mrs. Chasemore fixed her eyes upon Regina's face and guessed the truth in a moment.

"*Something to say to you,*" she repeated, with a harsh laugh. "I fancy I should find a great many things to say to you, that would considerably open your eyes, if we had time to discuss the past. Ah! you're a sharp girl, my dear, but you don't know everything yet. And so you don't get on too well with Vivian, eh?"

"I did not say so, Mrs. Chasemore."

"No; but you've let it out all the same. Well, never mind; you're not worse off than others. It's the usual fate of married people. If you had been very happy together, perhaps I should not have ventured to intrude myself upon your presence. You would have believed all he told you, and the very *worst of me——*"

"Indeed, Mrs. Chasemore——"

"You needn't take the trouble to deny it, my dear. Master Vivian has not concealed his real opinion of me, even from myself. I have the misfortune to know a great deal more about his former life than he would care to be repeated to his wife, and therefore he has been most anxious to keep us separate. There is no secret in the matter. He told me so, before you went abroad, with his own lips."

"But I always understood that you and he quarrelled so violently in his father's lifetime that it was the cause of his going on the stage, Mrs. Chasemore."

"That is what Vivian told you, is it? It only proves how men will stoop to deceive when they have anything to gain by it. I shall not attempt to deny the charge. I have only called here for the purpose of assuring you that there is no enmity on *my* side, and that if I am not admitted to your house in common with other visitors, it is by your husband's wishes, and not mine."

"But it is unheard of," said Regina, warmly, "that his father's widow should be excluded. Believe me, Mrs. Chasemore, that I have had nothing to do with it, and I shall tell Vivian my opinion on the matter as soon as he returns home."

1

"Pray do nothing of the sort. It will only make things worse instead of better. I never go out in society now, for my health has been very indifferent since the poor general died. It is a very lonely condition to be a widow, my dear, as I dare say your mamma has often told you. But I thought I should like to have a look at you, and to assure you that, if I can ever be of the least service to you, I shall be delighted."

"You are very kind. But it would seem strange to make use of a friend who was not even admitted to my house. You had better let me speak to Vivian about it. I don't in the least mind his being angry."

"You will do no good. His enmity to me is too deep-rooted, and some day you will know the cause. But if I might sometimes see you alone in the dusk as now, and hear how you are getting on together, it would give me great pleasure."

"I will give my maid orders to bring you up here whenever you call. If you ask for her, she will always let you know exactly who is in the house and who is out of it. But I am generally alone, when I am at home, in the afternoons."

"I may hope, then, sometimes to see you. Meanwhile, Mrs. Vivian, I wish you would remember that *there are two sides to every question*, and that the

rash act by which my step-son cut himself off from his friends and family requires some very strong excuse to render it justifiable."

"*Nothing* could justify it," cried Regina, "and it is absurd to suppose that *you* can have been the cause. I tell him so every day, and yet he brings his horrid actor acquaintances, that he knows I cannot bear the sight of, to stay in the house, and sit down to the same table with me."

"From which his poor father's widow is excluded," sighed Mrs. Chasemore. "Ah! well, my dear, he may yet live to know his true friends from his false ones."

"I should like to have a good long talk with you," said Regina, as her visitor rose to leave. "When will you come again?"

"Well, I think, under the circumstances, I had better not come unless you send for me. Here is my card and address. Should you be alone any day or evening, and would like to have my company, I shall be delighted to bestow it on you."

"I will let you know the first opportunity, Mrs. Chasemore. I long to hear all you can tell me of Vivian's former life."

"That would take a good many evenings I am afraid, my dear," replied Mrs. General Chasemore,

with an ominous shake of the head, as she shook hands with Regina and quitted the room.

CHAPTER II.

“YOU HAVE KILLED THE BEST PART IN ME.”

It was late in the afternoon when Mrs. General Chasemore left her step-son's house. Mrs. Perkins, who was sent downstairs as *avant-courier* to see that the coast was clear, and order James to be in readiness to open the door, whispered to him pertly that “the master's ma” was ready to go, and he was to “bundle her out before any one saw her.”

The occupants of the servants' hall had guessed the identity of the supposed “begging impostor” from the beginning, and from ambiguous sentences dropped here and there, had gathered pretty nearly the whole of her history, and the terms she was on with her step-son, before she paid her second visit to the house. What a mistake it is to suppose that we can ever keep anything a secret from our servants! The footman who stands behind their chairs knows how often his master and mistress have words together, as well as they do themselves, and the maid that brushes out her lady's hair has guessed whither

her affections are wandering before her own heart has decided the question.

James stuck his tongue in his cheek as Perkins delivered Regina's message to him, and then stationed himself at the hall-door, peeping through the side-panes of glass at the outer world, after the fashion of London footmen, whilst he awaited the advent of Mrs. General Chasemore. In another minute she had passed through the hall, and been let out of the house in apparent safety.

But fortune was against her. As she reached the lowest step, Vivian, lounging home from his club earlier than usual, and on foot, which he seldom did, turned from Portland Place into Premier Street, and recognised her figure. His step-mother was near-sighted: she lost the opportunity, therefore, of crossing the road and getting out of his way, and the consequence was that they almost ran into each other's arms. Mrs. Chasemore would gladly have passed him, but Vivian would not let her do so. He guessed the reason of her contiguity to his residence, and was boiling with passion, even as he raised his hat, with the same courtesy with which he would have saluted any other lady of his acquaintance.

"Mrs. Chasemore," he said, as he stopped in

front of her, "I must request a few words with you before you go any further."

"God bless my soul! it's Vivian!" she replied, looking at him through her glasses with a brazen air. "Why, I thought you fine London gentlemen never left your clubs till it was time for your dinner! Whatever brings you home at five o'clock?"

"Good luck, perhaps, since I have run against you. It is not the first time you have been in this neighbourhood, Mrs. Chasemore! I must request it will be the last."

"You request it, indeed! What next? Is the whole of Portland Place and its environs your property, that one must ask your leave before placing a foot in it?"

"You know what I mean well enough! You called at my house the other day with the intention of seeing my wife. Well, I don't intend that you shall see my wife—that is all!"

"Is the lady so submissive, then, that your will is law to her?"

"She will be submissive in this instance, because I will make her so."

"Dear me! You seem to rule the roast with a vengeance! But take care you don't go too far. Our sex is apt to overleap a strained authority."

"My wife has no desire to overleap mine—at all

events, in this instance. She has been carefully brought up, and is most particular in her own choice of acquaintance."

"Ah, I know your compliments of old, Vivian! But you have yet to prove that I have been calling on your carefully brought-up wife."

"I saw you descend the steps of my house!"

"Perhaps I was inquiring for you."

"You may save yourself the trouble for the future. Once for all, Mrs. Chasemore, any servant of mine that admits you shall get his dismissal. I don't wish to repeat what has so often been said between us before; but, after your past conduct to my father and myself, you shall never pass the threshold of any house of mine! Do you understand me?"

"You make your meaning plain enough and with your usual politeness."

"I don't want to be rude, but you force me to be plain-spoken! You have already compelled me to speak to my servants much more openly than I like to do upon such subjects, and to forbid them to allow you to enter the house."

"Oh, your servants are doubtless as submissive as your wife!" cried Mrs. Chasemore, ironically.

A suspicion darted into Vivian's mind.

"Is it possible that you *have* been admitted?" he asked inquisitively.

But Mrs. Chasemore perceived that she had gone too far.

"It is not possible that you can require to put such a question to me," she replied, "since you are so assured of the fealty of your household."

"I will find it out, however, before another hour is over our heads; and those who have disobeyed my orders shall suffer for it!" he said, as he strode away from her and entered his home.

James answered the door to him. He saw at a glance that his master was ruffled, and dreaded what he might have heard. Vivian desired that he would follow him to the library.

"Who has been here this afternoon?" he demanded, in a determined tone of voice, as the door was closed behind them. The servant commenced to stammer. "None of your shuffling!" exclaimed his master. "You know what I mean well enough. I gave you a strict order last week not to admit a certain person to my house, and I met her just now descending the steps. Has she been here or no?"

James did not know what to answer. He wished to screen his mistress; but he was not a liar by nature, and the best manner in which to shield her *did not* occur readily to him.

"If you please, sir, I wish you'd ask Mrs. Perkins about it."

"I shall do no such thing! My orders were given to you, and I demand an answer to my question from you. Has that woman been admitted to this house to-day?"

"Well, sir, it was entirely by Mrs. Perkins's orders. It went altogether against me to do it!"

"Mrs. Perkins's orders!" thundered Vivian. "Who is Mrs. Perkins, I should like to know? Is she the mistress of this house? How dare you try to screen yourself behind Mrs. Perkins?"

"Well, sir, she brought me her mistress's orders, of course, and I didn't know how to go against them. I'm very sorry if I've disobeyed you, sir, but it's very hard for a servant to know what to do, when two people pull different ways."

"*Two people pull different ways.*" The homely expression cut Vivian's heart like a knife. He felt it to be so true. But he was too proud to let his servant guess how he had wounded him.

"There's only one master in this house, James, and as you don't seem to know the fact, you'll have to learn it. Go and fetch Perkins and return here with her—at once! Do you hear?"

The footman, with a most crestfallen air, left the room to find the lady's-maid. She was in Regina's

dressing-room, busy over something that was required immediately, and very unwilling to leave it; but when she heard James's story, she looked as grave as he, and bundled her work to one side at once.

"Lor! you don't mean to tell me as the master's found it out!" she exclaimed. "Well, there *will* be a flare-up, and no mistake, for when them two get to loggerheads, they don't seem to care what they say to one another. But 'taint *our* fault, any way, and the master's too good not to see that, if it's only put to him in the proper light."

But Mrs. Perkins was rather mistaken in her calculations on Vivian's "goodness." He was standing on the hearthrug when the servants re-entered the room, restlessly tapping the floor with his foot; whilst a deep spot of crimson burned ominously in either cheek.

"Perkins," he commenced, "by whose orders did you tell James to admit the lady who has been here this afternoon?"

"She wasn't here more than half an hour, sir, I am sure, on the whole."

"Will you answer my question?" said Vivian, angrily. "Who told you to tell James to admit her?"

"My mistress, sir," replied Perkins, whimpering; "and I'm sure it's very 'ard upon a poor servant *when* she's bound to obey her lady in hall things,

even if she do go against the master, to find as she's only blamed for her pains."

"Did you understand that this woman was to be admitted against my express orders to the contrary?"

"Of course you did!" interposed James, who felt it would be a comfort to have a partner in his guilt. "We've talked it over, scores of times, and wondered at missus going against the master for such as her."

"But I didn't know——" began the woman.

"No more of this!" interrupted Vivian; "one of you is as bad as the other, and you will both leave my service to-morrow morning." At this abrupt intelligence the servants were aghast.

"Leave your service, sir!" they exclaimed simultaneously.

"Certainly! The first duty of a servant is obedience, and you have both failed in it. I will not keep you a day longer under my roof. The butler shall pay you your month's wages, and you will quit the house by twelve o'clock. And I will treat any other servant who dares to dispute my authority, never mind at whose instigation, in the same manner."

But when the two domestics had mournfully retired, Vivian felt that his anger was not yet ex-

peased. It had not been directed against the right object. Perkins and James might have failed in their allegiance to himself, but who, after all, was to blame them, when they had been instigated to rebellion by his own wife? He felt that he must see Regina, and he knew the interview would be a trying one. His servants' disobedience might make him angry, but his wife's cut him to the soul. The dismissal of his whole household could not purify it, whilst she held the reins of government and guided it in an opposite direction from what he desired her. He could wreak his vengeance on his poor irresponsible menials, by depriving them of a situation; but his beautiful wayward wife, whom he still loved so much, and who was so essentially indifferent to him, what could he do to make her tractable and obedient? Nothing but love or fear can guide a woman, and Regina knew neither feeling. She was totally free from all apprehension of difficulty or danger, and seemed to think her position so secure, that she could afford to act just as she chose. The position which, had she loved him, she would have dreaded to lose—her sovereignty over her husband's heart—was a matter which she would have laughed to scorn had it been presented to her. But she could feel anger, deep and lasting, if any *of her pet designs* were frustrated, and Vivian feared

to raise a tempest in her which he might find it difficult to quell. Yet his mind was so firmly made up upon this subject of Mrs. General Chasemore, that he resolved at all costs to speak. He was still cogitating what he should say to Regina, and how in a few strong words he should make her understand that he would not be thwarted, when she saved him the trouble of further deliberation, by appearing in the library ready armed for battle.

Mrs. Perkins had flown weeping to her mistress, to communicate the sad result of their joint duplicity; and the idea that Vivian had dared to dismiss her private attendant without her sanction, had roused Regina to a fury. As she entered the room and slammed the door behind her, Vivian thought he had never seen her look so handsome. An angry flush had mounted into her usually colourless cheeks, and her eyes glowed with passion.

"What do you mean, Vivian," she commenced loudly, "by dismissing my maid without my authority? I never heard of such a thing before, and I won't stand it. Perkins is my servant, not yours; and I refuse to allow her to leave this house on the dismissal of any one but myself."

Vivian had hoped to argue the point with his wife coolly; but her insolent manner irritated him,

though the voice in which he answered her was apparently calm.

"What you allow, or do not allow, is not of the slightest consequence in this matter, Regina. The servants have disobeyed my orders, and they will leave my service, as I told them; and after what has passed, you should be glad, instead of sorry, to think that they will be removed from your sight."

"And for what reason, pray?" she demanded.

"Because, if you thought rightly, it should be a source of constant humiliation to you to keep under your eyes two people whom you have stooped to make your companions in deceiving me."

"No such thing! I laid my commands upon them, as you might have done, and they obeyed them. And if you procure fresh servants to-morrow, they shall not remain in this house unless they obey what orders I choose to give them."

"Then you must learn to make your orders agree with mine. I confess that James and Perkins are not nearly so much to blame as you are, but you have brought these consequences upon their heads, and they must bear the brunt of them."

"If I am to blame, pray what do you consider you should be, who shut your doors in the face of your own father's widow, just because you are afraid of what she may disclose concerning you?"

"Is that one of the lies that woman has already been pouring into your ears?" cried Vivian, roused by her manner to show his irritation as well as feel it.

"I don't believe it to be a lie! I might have done so if you had not appeared so terribly afraid of my meeting your step-mother; but your very fear proclaims that you have something to dread from her."

"Take care what you say, Regina. You had better not go too far!" replied her husband, with closed teeth.

"Oh! you don't suppose I am afraid of speaking the truth, or of any one speaking it of me. Thank goodness, my antecedents are at the service of anybody who may feel an interest in them."

"It would be very strange, considering you are a woman, if they were not."

"I don't know that! There are very few women nowadays who can afford to have the whole of their single lives laid bare."

"What extraordinary specimens of the sex you must have been in the habit of associating with!"

"Perhaps I have! More extraordinary than such as you made your companions when you adopted that honourable profession—the stage."

"I often wish I had never left it," said Vivian,

impatiently. "The friends I made there were at least honest. They didn't collude with their inferiors in order to deceive me."

"Oh, that's a hit at me, of course! So gentlemanly and delicate of you to turn everything I say into a fresh reproach. It shows what a good effect your early training has had upon you."

"It has had at least the effect of making me independent and determined to be the master in my own house, and of my own wife. And that you appear still to have to learn, Regina."

"Assertion is no proof! You will have to prove yourself my master before I shall acknowledge you as such."

"Don't force me to prove it in any way which we may regret hereafter. Come, Regina, I have no wish to deal with you otherwise than gently in this matter! Only give me your word of honour that this woman whom I know to be a most unfit associate for you, shall never again be admitted to our house, and I will say no more about it."

"Indeed! I shall promise nothing of the sort. On the contrary, I desire that you countermand the orders you have laid upon James and Perkins. It is a gross insult to me, as the mistress of the house, *that* they should be dismissed because they have *done as I had told them to do.*"

"Then you must put up with the insult. You may be the mistress of the house, and I have never disputed your authority until now; but you are not mistress of yourself, and it is time you learned who is your master!"

"My *master* indeed!" cried Regina. "I would acknowledge no man as such, even if he were the king upon his throne!"

"You'll have to acknowledge *me* as such, all the same," returned Vivian coolly; "and the sooner the better, for your own sake as well as mine. I have let you have your way too long, and it is time you should submit to my control."

"Submit to your control!" she echoed scornfully. "Make me do it if you can! I defy you!"

He strode to her side, and grasped her by the arm.

"Don't make me use brute force," he said in a low voice, as he looked her full in the face.

Regina did not blench before him. She stared at him back again, hard and unyielding as brass.

"Just what I should have expected of you," she said mockingly; "wrench my arm out of the socket, *do!* It would only be on a piece with the rest of your manly behaviour. Brute force indeed! Why, it's the only sort of force which you know how to exercise upon a woman."

"I am not likely to hurt you," he returned, "but if you continue in this state of rebellion I shall disgrace you, by locking you up in your own room until you come to your senses. Once for all, Regina, I *will* be obeyed, and it is useless your attempting to oppose me. I have never interfered with any of your associates or pleasures until now, but here I am firm. You must promise me never to see Mrs. General Chasemore again, or I shall take means to make you obedient."

"Well then, I shall *not* promise you. There!" Vivian's handsome face grew very dark as he tightened his grasp upon her arm with the intention of leading her upstairs.

"*Coward!*" she exclaimed, in a fury. "You are hurting me!"

At that word his hold relaxed, and he let her go. But his anger was increased tenfold.

"No man has ever dared to call me by that name," he said.

"But a woman dares!" she retorted. "You are a double coward, first for trying to intimidate me by your words, and then, finding them fail, by your violence. But you will learn that I am not to be treated in this way with impunity. It is all very *well* when you have got me in the library with the *door shut*, but we'll see whether you will like to re-

peat your conduct in the presence of your cousin Sir Arthur and your fine actor friend Mr. Selwyn."

"I should not be ashamed to repeat what I have said or done this hour in the presence of the whole world. I have not uttered a falsehood, as you have. Regina! you know that I am not a coward. During the years that we have been married, and the many unhappy differences that have taken place between us, I have never treated you otherwise than with justice and forbearance. Only unsay those words. Tell me that you do not really think me a coward, and I will do all that lies in my power to make my wishes coalesce with yours."

But Regina saw that she had gained the upper hand in tormenting, and with the usual pettiness of her sex, would not forego one iota of her triumph, although a proud man stooped to sue for peace at her hands.

"I can't unsay them! I think you have proved yourself a thorough coward by the way in which you have tried to domineer over me to-day, and I despise you for it from the bottom of my heart."

"You despise me! Good God! has it come to this? You will tell me next that you do not love me."

"Is it to be supposed that I can, after the brutal manner in which you have behaved to me?"

Vivian staggered backward. With all her cool indifference, Regina had never gone so far as this.

"Why did you marry me if you did not love me?" he exclaimed, in a voice of anguish. But the anguish did not appeal to her hard heart. She felt cold and unyielding as stone.

"Heaven knows! I am sure I don't. I suppose my mother had raised the devil in me, worse than usual, on the day that you were so unlucky as to propose."

"And you took me as the least unpleasant alternative?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It may have been so. We were horribly poor you know, and the prospect of any change must have appeared delightful to me then."

"Go on! go on!" exclaimed her husband, sarcastically; "tell me that you married me for my money only, and finish your fiendish work at once."

"Really, Vivian, to hear the pathetic manner in which you put the question, one would imagine you had never heard of such a thing as a woman marrying for a settlement before."

He looked into her unsympathetic eyes and seemed to read the truth there, notwithstanding the vagueness of her reply.

"God forgive you, Regina," he said bitterly;

"you have killed all the best part in me from to-day."

And with that he turned away, leaving her standing in the dusk-laden library alone, and rushed out again, apparently not knowing or caring whither, into the bleak March air.

CHAPTER III.

"INDEED YOU HAD BETTER SEND FOR A DOCTOR."

AT first Regina quite believed that he would return to dinner. She heard the vehement slam as the hall-door closed after him, and she laughed quietly to herself, and thought that his anger would soon evaporate in the cool evening air. This was not the first quarrel that had marred the harmony of their married life, though it was by far the worst. And when their former dissensions had taken place, Vivian had always been the one to come round first, and try to restore peace between them. His loving heart could not bear the semblance of coldness, and he was never happy until he had forced her to confess that she was appeased. It would be the same on this occasion, so she thought—indeed, she rather prided herself that she had gone so far, and believed it would do Vivian good, if he thought that instead

of having secured her affection he had still to win and deserve it. So, after the first shock of her husband's abrupt departure was over, she went upstairs very complacently to dress for dinner. They expected a few friends to join them that evening, and Regina imagined that a little extra attention to her toilet would have a beneficial effect upon Vivian's feelings. So she ordered the subdued and tearful Perkins to robe her in one of her most becoming dresses—a cream-coloured satin, which displayed every line of her figure to perfection, and in which she had already called forth her husband's warmest admiration. Her golden hair was bound round her head with strings of pearls, and the same ornaments graced her bosom and her arms. As she stood before the glass, preparatory to descending to the drawing-room, she looked as pure and pale as a tinted statue. She did not presume so far as to promise a re-installation in office to the weeping lady's-maid, but she threw out strong hints that it was not an impossibility, which made Mrs. Perkins later in the evening confide her suspicions to James, that "the mistress must have got the better of the master this time," at which conjecture the delinquents rejoiced together. But before long their hopes waxed fainter. Amongst the friends whom Regina had invited to dinner that evening were the Farthingales,

whom both Sir Arthur and Vivian desired to meet after their absence from England. The little lawyer and his daughter, together with two or three other guests, and the gentlemen who were staying in the house, assembled in the drawing-room not long after Regina entered it, and before the dinner-hour arrived, their party, with the exception of Vivian, was complete. Naturally inquiries began to be made after the master of the house, and James was sent on more than one fruitless errand to his dressing-room to see if he had come in. All kinds of notions were started to account for his absence; only Mr. Everard Selwyn, to whom Regina had an instinctive aversion, appeared to guess the true state of the case.

"I thought I heard Chasemore and you talking in the library, Mrs. Chasemore, about an hour ago!" he said, with a suspicious look at his hostess.

"I have no doubt you did! Vivian had just come in from his club, and was detailing some of the servants' delinquencies to me in so dramatic a manner that I told him he would be heard down in the kitchen. But he acquired that horrid habit of talking loud, I suppose, upon the stage, and I am afraid he will never drop it."

"It must be awkward sometimes!" said Selwyn, dryly.

"How much longer are we to wait for him?" inquired Sir Arthur, with the freedom of a relation, as he consulted his watch. "It is nearly half-past eight, and the *entrées* will be spoiled, as well as the cook's temper."

"Not forgetting your own!" rejoined Regina. "We will not risk it, Sir Arthur. Dinner shall be served at once." And she gave the necessary orders to the servants.

It will be remembered that when he had hoped to make her his wife, Sir Arthur Chasemore had very sincerely admired Regina Nettleship. That admiration had not died out, notwithstanding the severe blow his vanity had received at her hands—notwithstanding also that Regina invariably snubbed him, for an undue love of admiration was not one of her particular sins. She was too much used to it, perhaps, to overrate its value; and at the same time she regarded the baronet with peculiar aversion on account of his being the heir to her husband's property. And Selina Farthingale, who had quite recovered any personal wound she may have received by Sir Arthur's openly avowed distaste to her, yet could not watch his evident appreciation of the appearance of Regina, in her cream-coloured *satin* dress, without a pang of jealousy—a feeling *which* one can scarcely reconcile with her keen

desire to be revenged upon the baronet. But women's hearts are the strangest contradictions, and the most unlikely feelings to grow together lie coiled there like a nest of snakes. You may be sure that Selina had not carried away Miss Janet Oppenheim's letter from the hall-table without reading it, and she triumphed inwardly and maliciously as she sat in Regina's drawing-room and remembered that it had never reached the hands for which it was intended. Its contents had somewhat startled her, for by them she learned that the pupil-teacher at Clarence Lodge and Sir Arthur Chasemore had been corresponding freely during the whole period of his wanderings abroad, and looked forward to meeting on his return as naturally as though they had been the oldest of friends. Selina had not yet decided on her line of action in the matter—whether she should openly inform Miss Netherwood of the unseemly intimacy her teacher was secretly carrying on, or bide her time and work in the dark, as so many of her dear sex delight to do. Her anger at the discovery she had made was due more to the belief that Sir Arthur had informed Janet of the interview that had passed between Mr. Farthingale and himself, than to any fear that Miss Oppenheim was ambitious to usurp the place she had coveted. That was too ridiculous an idea to find harbour in her mind for a single

moment. This was the first occasion on which the Farthingales and Sir Arthur Chasemore had met since his return home, and their mutual greetings (although the little lawyer still managed the money affairs of both cousins) were rather constrained. The baronet could not forget that the hard terms on which Mr. Farthingale advanced him five hundred pounds had compelled him to throw up his profession for a while, and leave England; whilst the lawyer, on his part, keenly remembered the cool disdain with which his own proposals on a certain memorable occasion had been rejected by the impoverished baronet. It was consequently Sir Arthur's rôle to appear as *débonnair* and unembarrassed as possible, which he did by talking freely of the delightful sojourn he had made abroad, and the collection of pretty things which he had brought back with him.

"I have a set of carved coral from Algiers, that is a perfect marvel for beauty of workmanship," he said, as the party sat round the dinner-table. "I purchased it for a little friend of mine who is very fair—as fair as yourself, Regina, and I expect it will create quite a sensation when she appears in it."

"You have never shown it to me," remarked Regina, languidly. Something like fear had sprung up

in her breast at Vivian's prolonged absence. Did he really mean what he had said this time?

"Because I have not yet unpacked them," replied Sir Arthur; "but I am sure you will say they are unique. I want Vivian to see them before they go away. He thinks so much of those coral cameos he got in Rome last year."

"And who is your 'little friend'?" said Regina.

"Ah! come, that's not fair! but I can assure you that she is worthy of the corals——"

"Or, at any rate, you may be certain she will not reject them!" laughed Selina, sourly.

She wondered if that minx Janet Oppenheim was to be the recipient of these priceless ornaments; but no! it was too incredible. What should a pupil-teacher at Clarence Lodge do with carved corals?

The general conversation went on briskly; but Regina was almost silent, so was Everard Selwyn. The bleak March day had ended in a wet night, and the heavy rain might be heard splashing against the window-panes. But the wife's heart was not anxious for the safety or well-being of her absent husband. All she feared was what the present company might think of his non-appearance at his own table. It was so low and vulgar to quarrel openly. She could not bear that they should guess that she and Vivian ever stooped to such a thing.

Sir Arthur was still discoursing eagerly about the countries he had visited and the treasures he had collected, when she gave the signal for her own sex to retire to the drawing-room. There were two other ladies present beside Selina, and as soon as they were alone they naturally fell into pairs.

Miss Farthingale clung to her hostess, and opened warfare with a tirade of compliments. She had never seen Regina looking so well or so young or so handsome in her life before. It was a great object with Selina just now to get on intimate terms in Premier Street, and she could think of no better means for laying the foundation of a renewed intimacy.

Mrs. Vivian Chasemore received all her flattery as though it were her due. She had never done more than patronise Selina Farthingale in her maiden days, and she was scarcely likely to go further now. But like many another self-elected planet, she loved to have her ring of satellites revolving round her. And Selina and she had one feeling in common, intuitively felt, although, as yet, unexpressed—their mutual dislike of Sir Arthur.

“I trust you are not feeling too anxious, dear Mrs. Chasemore!” exclaimed Selina, in reference to Vivian. “He may have met with some friends, and been detained. Still, it is very curious—is it not?”

"Very much so. I do not imagine that any harm can have come to Mr. Chasemore; but I am astonished that he should have forgotten we expected friends this evening. He will scarcely forgive himself when he remembers it."

At this moment, James, handing round the coffee, whispered to his mistress that Mr. Selwyn was anxious to speak to her for a moment; and, with an apology to her guests, she left the room. She found the actor waiting outside the room, leaning against the marble Mercury.

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Mrs. Chasemore! but I cannot feel happy until I have heard something of Vivian. Have you any idea in which direction he has gone?"

Regina's lip curled with disdain. What right had this vulgar professional to interfere in her private affairs?

"Really, Mr. Selwyn, I cannot see what difference it would make if I did!"

"Because I mean to follow him, and bring him home again. See what a night it is! Is it fit weather for Vivian to be out in his excited condition?"

"Mr. Chasemore is not a child, Mr. Selwyn. He is perfectly able to look after himself, and I cannot see that his unpardonable absence calls for inter-

ference on our part. He is not easily reasoned into adopting any course that is against his own wishes?"

"Don't you think so?" said Everard Selwyn, sorrowfully. "We always considered him so very open to conviction or affection."

The "we" grated on Regina's ear.

"Perhaps he has dropped his pliability with the rest of the good manners you taught him," she answered haughtily. "However, I have not the least idea where he is at present; and I advise you not to trouble yourself upon the matter either."

"I cannot promise that! I must go round to his clubs, and the places where I think it most likely to find him, and try and persuade him to hear reason. I am quite aware that he was very angry when he left the house. I suppose I may say that you are anxious to see him—may I not, Mrs. Chase-more?"

"Indeed, I beg you will do nothing of the kind!" she answered hastily. "It would be as untrue as it would be useless. As far as I am concerned, the longer he stays away the better!"

She returned to the drawing-room as she spoke, and Everard Selwyn, with a sad heart, left the house.

He was very much attached to Vivian. He knew

what a sterling good nature he had, and what a rash undisciplined temper; and would never have been surprised to hear of any act of folly he had committed whilst under the influence of such a misunderstanding as Selwyn felt sure had taken place between him and his wife. He ran from haunt to haunt, seeking his friend everywhere, but without success; and at twelve o'clock he came back in the pouring rain, hoping to hear that Vivian had already returned. But the household had heard nothing of its master.

Regina had just dismissed her guests and taken her way upstairs, and Sir Arthur was smoking cosily in the room set apart for the charms of tobacco, and laughed at Selwyn for having been such a fool as to leave a warm fire and a good bottle of wine, to run about London on a wild-goose chase after a harum-scarum fellow like his cousin.

"He and my lady have had a tiff," he said, as he welcomed Everard back. "That fact is as plain as a pikestaff; though I can't see why Vivian should make such a fuss about it. It's an every-day occurrence in married life—at least, so I've always heard—and nothing when you're used to it. And if Mrs. Regina's eyes tell true tales, it's not the first time by a good many she's combed his hair for him with a three-legged stool! Sit down, Everard, my boy, and

help yourself, and let's drink to a long bachelorhood, and everybody's wife but our own! We'll make a night of it, if you like, and sit up until your precious friend chooses to come home again; though I must say I think his cigars and his whisky are better worth consideration than himself."

But Sir Arthur and Everard Selwyn grew tired even of such good company before Vivian returned. They sat up together, chatting and conjecturing, until the clock struck three, and then they stretched themselves and retired to bed.

Regina heard them pass her door as she sat in her dressing-room, trying to beguile the time with a book. She was beginning to feel really nervous now—nervous lest something should have happened to her husband. She could not forget that in that case she was utterly unprovided for. No more cream-coloured satin dresses then, nor strings of pearls. They would have become things of the past, and she would be lucky if she contrived to keep clothes upon her back with the miserable pittance Vivian's life assurance money would provide her. She almost cried as she remembered it: she pitied herself so much for what she might be called upon to undergo.

Why didn't she have a child, she thought, like other people? Selina Farthingale had been telling

her of the marriage of that hideous little fright, Mary Martin, who had one shoulder much higher than the other, and how she was now the mother of a splendid boy. Regina believed that Selina had only related the circumstance to make her feel jealous, and she would have liked to have boxed her ears for it. But it was the usual thing. She knew several girls who had "come out" the same year as herself, and were now the proprietors of three and four children—quite large families, and who complained every time she met them of the nuisance it was to have so many little ones.

And all she wanted was one—only one! but she was almost tired of wishing for it. When Regina considered how much depended on the advent of that one child, she was disposed to blame Providence very freely for withholding the gift. It was not the lack of maternity that disappointed her: it was the lack of an heir to stand between her and the haunting dread of poverty.

Four o'clock, five o'clock sounded, and Vivian had not yet returned! She concluded, then, that he must have gone to the house of some friend for the night, and it was of no use sitting up for him any longer. At any rate, she thought, as she laid her weary head upon her pillow, if the worst had happened, she could make it no better by tiring herself

to death. Yet the first question she asked, on awaking the next morning, was if any news had been heard of Mr. Chasemore. Mrs. Perkins answered dejectedly in the negative; for the butler had informed her that if his master did not return to counter-order their dismissal, she and James would have to leave the house, whether they liked it or no. But an hour afterwards a hurried knock was heard upon the door of Regina's dressing-room, and Mr. Selwyn's voice demanded to speak to her if possible at once. She threw on a wrapper, and joined him on the landing.

"Vivian has returned at last, Mrs. Chasemore! I thought you would be glad to know it; but he seems to have been wandering about all night in the rain, and I am afraid he has made himself thoroughly ill!"

"Dear me! How foolish! I thought he had more sense. Where is he? Why doesn't he come here?"

"He refused to do so. He has gone into the spare bedroom and thrown himself upon the bed. Indeed, Mrs. Chasemore, I think you had better send for a doctor. He is wet through to the skin and shivering all over. I am sure he will have an attack of illness unless he is seen to at once."

"Nonsense! Surely a wetting can't do a man

any harm! However, you had better consult his own wishes on the subject."

"I am afraid he is not fit to be consulted. He appears half delirious, to me."

"Most likely he has had more than is good for him. It is very disgusting, but Vivian has transgressed more than once in that way lately. You had better send for the doctor, Mr. Selwyn. The butler knows his address. And pray keep Vivian away from me till he is himself again. I have no wish to see him in so degrading a condition."

"Indeed you are mistaken," commenced Selwyn earnestly; but she shut the door whilst he was speaking, and he turned away disheartened by her want of feeling.

He had not told her that as he went to meet his friend in the hall that morning, Vivian had thrown himself into his arms and murmured incoherently: "Oh, Selwyn—Selwyn! she doesn't care for me, my boy. She only married me for my d—d money—she told me so!"—before he nearly fainted away from the excitement and exposure he had undergone, and that since then he had lain face downwards on the bed, muttering broken sentences, bearing the same import, to himself.

The medical man, who was summoned at once, pronounced the case at first to be only the effects

of a violent chill, but was compelled before nightfall to change his opinion and call it fever. Whatever it may have been, it detained Vivian Chasemore in bed for nearly a month, during which time he resolutely refused to see or speak with his wife.

The mere mention of her name drove him into a passion, and Everard Selwyn was obliged at last to ignore it altogether. That faithful friend alone sat by his bedside, whilst Regina went here, there, and everywhere, in order to pass away the dull spring weather, and professed, as far as lay in her power, to know everything about the domestic arrangements of her husband's sick-room. At last Vivian was convalescent, and Dr. Morton recommended a few weeks at the seaside to restore his strength before the fatigues of the London season began. Ventnor was selected as possessing the temperature best suited to his case, and thither Selwyn accompanied him in the early part of April. The actor had been most anxious to bring about a meeting and a reconciliation between the husband and wife before Vivian left home, but the sick man was resolute. The last words and looks that had passed between them seemed to be burned in upon his memory, and he shuddered at the mere thought of seeing her again.

"When I come back, perhaps—when I come

back!" was all the answer Selwyn could extract from him.

Had Regina been a loving, repentant woman, however undisciplined and hasty in disposition, who would have watched and waited for her opportunity to throw one pleading glance in Vivian's direction, his resolution would probably have given way; but she kept completely out of his sight. She encased herself in an armour of pride and reserve, and almost believed, as she constantly assured Selwyn, that she never wished to see her husband again. The quarrel that had taken place between them was no secret to Everard, for Vivian had blabbed it all in his first weakness, and Regina had defiantly capped every word he uttered. So that their friend really thought that, under the circumstances, time and separation would work the best cure. But a few days after Vivian had departed for Ventnor, Regina was surprised to receive a letter in his handwriting.

"He has come to his senses at last, has he?" she thought, as she broke the seal. "So much the better for him, then, for I think if he had kept up this sort of thing much longer, I should have felt very much disposed to do something desperate myself by way of a change."

The contents of her letter, however, were very different from what she expected.

"I write to tell you," it said, "that I have decided on making a fishing expedition to Norway with Lord Charlesford, and Selwyn will accompany us. I do not know how long I shall be away—perhaps a twelvemonth—perhaps more, but that is of little consequence. At any rate I shall not return until I feel I can meet you again as a friend, which end can only be accomplished by time and absence. Meanwhile, you will receive an ample allowance for your necessities, which will doubtless compensate you for any inconveniences you may experience from my absence.

"I write to Mr. Farthingale by this post to make all necessary arrangements. If you like to have your mother or any lady friend to live with you whilst I am away, do so. I know I can trust to your discretion to make this unfortunate business as little public as possible. I have given out that the state of my health necessitates a complete change, so you had better spread the same story.

"Yours sincerely,

"VIVIAN CHASEMORE."

Only that! No more! Not a word of love, or regret, or sympathy. Only these few cold lines to say that they were about to part perhaps for years—perhaps for ever!

Regina, as she read them and realised all they might portend, felt more of a woman than she had ever done in her life before. Her husband's prolonged absence in a strange country meant, for him, risks from climate, travelling, and the accidents of sport; and for herself, solitude, a humdrum existence, and the whispered comments of her female friends.

And as Regina thought of all this, she actually cried, not in a whimper nor with tears of baffled rage, but with a good downright hearty "cry," such as she had very seldom indulged in before. Vivian was nearer to her heart at that moment than she would have acknowledged. If he had only come back then to plead for reconciliation, his proud wife would have opened her arms to him in a manner that would have taken him completely by surprise. But he was at Ventnor, making his preparations to go in Lord Charlesford's yacht to Norway, and little guessed that Regina was weeping for him at home.

The next day, however, the softened feeling had been crushed out again by her indomitable pride, and she despised herself for having given way to it.

If Vivian could enjoy himself away from her, what obstacle was there to her following his example? So that Lord Charlesford's yacht, the *Thisbe*, had

barely lost sight of English land, before Mrs. Vivian Chasemore was again mixing in society, and receiving guests at her own home.

CHAPTER IV.

“ALONE WITH HIM! I CANNOT BEAR IT.”

THE two years and a half that had been spent by Mrs. Vivian Chasemore in running about to Paris, or to Nice, or to Italy in search of health and amusement, had been passed by Mrs. Kit Masters entirely in the environs of Drury Lane. The poorer classes dare not think of “change.” Whether the season be sickly or otherwise, they must remain and brave it through; thankful if they escape infection, and submissive if they fare no worse than their neighbours.

When we saw Bonnie last, she had just reached a crisis in her new life. Her husband had struck her! But do not let it be supposed that that blow fell upon her blooming cheek with half the sting that one of Regina’s unkind words sank into Vivian’s heart. Bonnie had been too much used to see husbands strike their wives, to feel as if an irreparable *injury* had been done to her dignity. She only felt *it* and cried under it as a child might have done,

It was unjustly given, of course. So does the child often vote its parent unjust in punishment, but it is compelled to submit all the same, and it does not fall in its own estimation on account of the blow. Bonnie had flown to her grandmother with her grievance on that occasion, but the old woman had not sympathised very strongly with her sense of injury.

"Lor', child!" she exclaimed, "a little 'it like that from a man don't mean nothin'. I suppose you druv 'im beside hisself and 'e just let out at you. You mustn't think of sich trifles! Why, I can remember when your grandfather, who was as good a 'usband as ever stepped, used to cuff me right and left if I went against 'im. You mustn't never go against a man. Allays let 'im 'ave 'is own way, and 'e'll jog on quiet enough."

"But he's broke all my things," sobbed Bonnie.

"Lor', now, they was only rubbage! it's no use thinkin' of them. Kit will buy you better ones when 'e comes to his senses, see if 'e don't. And now, Bonnie, you be good and clear up all the litter afore 'e comes in again, or you'll drive me to cuff you myself, which has never been my 'abit, as you well know."

What with her grandmother's argument and Kit's apparent forgetfulness of the scene they had passed

through, Bonnie began to think she must have been the only one in the wrong, and that to strike a newly-made wife on the side of the head was the rule, rather than the exception, in holy matrimony. She knew that Mr. and Mrs. Bull, round the corner, had periodical quarrels, when the woman always came off with the worst of the bargain, and she could recollect the day when poor Ann Martin, the shoemaker's wife, came screaming into her grandmother's parlour, with her cheek laid open from a blow with a cobbler's awl. She had thought once that these were unhappy marriages, and that people that loved each other never fought. Something in the lessons of refinement which she had unconsciously imbibed from Alfred Waverley's society and surroundings had imbued her with the idea that husbands and wives should be the dearest and truest friends to one another, but she supposed now that she had been mistaken. To be a wife, she found, was to be a sort of servant—at the beck and call of one person only—who must do, not what she liked, but what she was told, or she would be punished for her disobedience.

Kit Masters did not often again allude to the jealous fit she had roused in him. Either he forgot it, or he thought it best not to recall the *circumstance* to her. But it influenced him to be much

rougher and harsher with Bonnie than he might otherwise have been. As time went on, the conjugal endearments which she had so much dreaded were dropped altogether, and a curt commanding manner took their place. Bonnie ran, fetched and carried for her lord and master like a dog, and like a dog she was cuffed for disobedience or neglect.

This sort of usage soon had an effect on her. She had never been strong in the head, and she now became stupid and dull—confused ideas chased each other through her brain—her memory seemed torpid, and all life passed before her like some troubled dream. Old Mrs. Bell declared that marriage, instead of brightening Bonnie's wits, had made her "dafter" than before, whilst Kit asserted that she was "a perfect fool," and that if she didn't look a little sharper after his comforts, he'd jog her memory with a stick. But neither her husband's promises nor his fulfilment of them seemed to make any difference in Bonnie. She went through her daily work in a sluggish, unmeaning sort of way, and when she failed in pleasing him, she took her punishment without a murmur. Poor little Bonnie! before a twelvemonth had gone over her head, she was used to being "hit,"—and really did not seem to care whether it took place or not. Only it made her head more stupid and confused. And sometimes, when Kit Masters

was out with his greengrocer's cart (for since the memorable meeting with Vivian Chasemore he had not taken his wife with him as a regular thing), she would sit for hours with her hands clasped to her forehead, trying to disentangle the mental confusion that reigned there.

Meanwhile, although she never complained of ill-health, the rounded symmetry of Bonnie's figure had departed, and her face looked half the size that it had been before. There was an aching unsatisfied longing in her heart which she hardly associated with the memory of Alfred Waverley, but which she knew felt worse and oppressed her most whenever her grandmother alluded to the days when their lodger was with them, or wondered what had become of him since he left.

The neighbours remarked the alteration in the girl's appearance, and warned Mrs. Bell that she was going into a "waste," but all the old woman's answer was, "that if it was the Lord's will to take her, she was sure she wasn't going to be the one to interfere, for she didn't believe that Kit and she would ever get on too well as man and wife." At which the neighbours would shake their heads sympathisingly and say, that "marriage was a lottery, *that it was*, and the greatest mercy in this life was

being able to think as there was none of it in heaven!"

But notwithstanding Bonnie's wasted figure she did not die, or even fall sick. It was the old grandmother who was called home first. Two years after Bonnie's marriage, there was a very hard winter—so hard a one that it drove Regina to Nice for months together, and brought her home wrapped up in those furs which Lady William declared must have cost hundreds of pounds. Mrs. Bell, however, not possessing even hundreds of pence to spend on her own comfort, and having reached the good old age of seventy, succumbed to the bitter atmosphere, and sank under an attack of inflammation of the lungs. Her grandmother's death appeared to strike Bonnie more as a fear than a trouble. Mrs. Bull, who helped to lay out the corpse, could not believe that the girl realised that the old woman was gone from her, as she watched her sitting by the bedside, holding the dead hand in her own, and heard her talking as though she expected to have an answer to her words.

She went home to tell her husband that Bonnie's manner scared her much more than attendance on the corpse had done, and that she'd rather by a great deal sit up all night alone with old Mrs. Bell in her shroud, than have her granddaughter to bear

her company. "How ever Kit Masters can get along with a wife like that, I can't understand. Why, she's no better than a big child. I'm sure if you'd seen her to-day, you'd 'ave said she was just fit for a 'sylum—and nothin' else. I know poor dear Mrs. Bell 'ad a tryin' time with 'er from her cradle upwards, and it's a pity she weren't took fust, that's what I say."

"Why, ain't she got an 'usband to look arter 'er?" said Mr. Bull, who considered marriage to be the aim and the end (as it too often is, especially the end) of womankind.

"True! but Kit Masters, 'e cuffs 'er about too much. I take it 'e don't understand the gal's natur. She was allays soft, and now she seems softer to me than ever. I don't believe she's got the least notion that her poor grandmother's gone from 'er."

But if Bonnie could not realise the fact of her bereavement all at once, it was evident enough that she understood it on the day of the interment, when her frantic screams raised the neighbourhood, and caused her to receive more than one "cuff" from Mr. Masters' kindly hand, as a quieting dose, before he left her to follow the body to the grave.

Mrs. Bull and others had tried to dress Bonnie *in her mourning* and make her attend the funeral *in vain*. She had wildly resisted all attempts to induct

her into the new black dress, and entreated them to bring her grandmother's coffin upstairs again, and not to part her from her only friend. Kit's soothing-mixture had the effect of turning the poor child's excited screams into low sobs, but when the hearse and the mourning-coach had driven away from the door, and she found she was really left alone in the deserted house, her agony of mind was extreme. She threw herself upon the floor, stifling her sobs in the skirt of her dress, as though she feared that her husband might yet be attracted back to the house again in order to still them.

"Alone! alone!" she kept on murmuring to herself; "all alone with *him*. Oh! I cannot bear it! I shall go mad! I cannot, cannot bear it!"

The remembrance of her grandmother's kindly old face, with its seamed and puckered forehead, its mild brown eyes and toothless mouth, struck her with overwhelming pain. She had often corrected her, it is true: she had called her "daft" and "soft" and useless, and told her to put up with Kit's unkindness, and thank the Lord he was no worse—but still she had loved her. She was sure of that! She thought of the cold trembling old hand that used sometimes to stroke her hair: of the quiet kiss laid upon her forehead: of the quivering voice that bade her be patient and good, and remember that it was

her duty to submit—and she felt sure her grandmother had loved her, for the sake of her father whom she had laid to sleep in the churchyard.

And now that she had gone there was *no one*—no one to whom she could fly in peril or distress: no one to bid her be brave and make the best of things. It was this sense of utter loneliness that struck Bonnie with so much terror: the fear of being left completely in the power of Kit Masters, without a creature to turn to for comfort or protection. She pondered on the idea until it touched her brain, and she turned her head restlessly from side to side, like some wild animal trying to shake off the oppression of pain. At last the horrid thought struck her that time was hurrying on, and the funeral party would soon be returning to the house. If *he* caught her again, there would be no escape for her. She would have to live her whole life alone with him, and the idea frightened her into action. She rose hastily, and without the least preparation ran downstairs and left the house by the back door.

She had no bonnet on her head, and her dress was tumbled and in disorder; but that was of little consequence. Such sights were not unusual in Drury Lane, and so long as she could walk straight, no one would molest her. The child did not walk, *she ran*; with a swift, light step that took her over

the ground like a lapwing. Where she was going she had no idea, nor with what purpose she thus sped along. She only felt that she was hurrying from *him*, and that if he did not find her she would not be laughed at again when she was stupid, nor struck on the head when she was dull, nor sworn at until her senses swam with the terror and the din. She knew that she ran quickly on, past houses and shops and theatres; by cabs and carts and omnibuses; over bridges and through streets, until she arrived at a broad road where the houses stood apart from one another, and in gardens where the frost lay heavily.

Bonnie breathed more freely as she reached this place, for she had never seen it before, and therefore she hoped that Kit had never seen it either; but still she dared not halt even for a moment. The broad road was succeeded by another and yet another, until the girl gained the open country, and saw fields spread out before her, and a beautiful glistening river, and farmhouses with their comfortable homesteads, and the shining hoarfrost over all. But the day was drawing in by that time; the bright cold sky had gradually become overcast with dark lead-coloured clouds, and the snow commenced to fall. Bonnie shivered as the keen air penetrated her scanty clothing; but she plodded on still the

same, for her head was burning, and every sound that came to her upon the frosty air, she transformed into the galloping of a horse's hoofs, following to overtake her and carry her back to Kit Masters. And so she toiled on, forgetful of hunger, cold, and fatigue, until the evening shadows fell and hid her from view.

* * * * *

When Mr. Masters returned with the funeral party from seeing the old woman laid in her grave, and found his wife absent without leave, his annoyance was not concealed in his own breast. He believed at first that Bonnie had only "stepped out" to visit a neighbour, and publicly averred his intention of giving her "a bit of his mind," as soon as she stepped home again. Mrs. Bull, who, in return for her delicate attentions to the deceased, had been invited to partake of the funeral "baked meats," and who was a very good-natured woman, begged Kit not to put himself out, as she would do all that was necessary in preparing the meal that ought to have been set ready for their return.

"Bonnie's seemed nigh off 'er 'ead this mornin' with trouble, Masters, and you mustn't be 'ard on 'er if she 'ave gone off to 'ave a good talk with *some one*, and forgot the dinner for once in a way.

There's nothin' so refreshin' after a death as to 'ave a good talk with them as can feel for you."

"Ah!" replied Mr. Masters, with a knowing look, "if she's bin hoff 'er 'ead this mornin', 'er 'ead will be hoff 'er this evenin' if she don't get some very good excuse for this be'aviour. Why, what's a wife for, I should like to know, if a man's to come 'ome and find no dinner ready for 'im. And on a day like this, too, when we 'ave hall bin a-tramping harter that blessed old grandmother of her'n. Do you call that pleasure? 'cos I don't! The honly thing I had to look forrard to was my dinner, and if Bonnie don't account to me for this little joke of her'n, well I'm jiggered! that's all."

But the dinner appeared in due course, and was consumed and digested, and still there was no Bonnie. They even came to fear lest the girl should have made away with herself in her trouble, and searched every possible place of concealment without effect. Kit Masters grew more sullen and ominously silent as the afternoon drew on, whilst his father and mother, who were present, entreated him not to be too harsh with his wife when she did come back; and Mrs. Bull tried to bring forward every plea she could devise to account for Bonnie's delinquency.

"You know as she ain't quite the thing in her

head, Masters, and you'll promise not to be too rough with 'er when she comes 'ome—won't yer now? For reely I'm sometimes afraid she'll 'ave a fit when you hit 'er; she do go so blue about the mouth and chin."

"Yes! you must take care what you're about, Christopher," chimed in his mother; "for Job Keeley finished his wife by mistake one day, you know, and is serving his time for it now, poor fellow. It would be an orfel thing if you was to 'ave the same misfortune 'appen to you."

"Don't you be afraid as I'll do anything to git myself into trouble, old lady," rejoined her amiable son; "but if a man's not to find fault with his own property, I should like to know who is. My wife's so soft she don't understand anything but a lickin', and I've never given 'er a reg'lar one as yet, as all the street knows."

"And I 'opes you'll never try it, Masters," said Mrs. Bull; "for as sure as you do, that gal will 'ang or dround of herself. You've given 'er quite enuff a'ready."

"'Ave I?" he replied with a leer, for he had imbibed considerably more liquor than was good for *him* that day; "well, jest wait till she comes 'ome, and we'll see if she can't stand a leetle more. I

can't 'ave bin very 'ard on 'er, or she wouldn't 'ave dared play me this trick."

But the funeral party dispersed, and yet the missing girl had not been seen nor heard of, and two or three days passed without intelligence being received of her.

Kit Masters grumbled to himself and swore to the neighbours, whenever the subject of his wife was mentioned before him, but he seemed to feel no further interest in the matter, nor to be taking any trouble to search for her whereabouts. Once or twice he said he supposed she had gone off with some other "feller," and so she might for all he cared; for he could get on quite as well, and a deal better, without her than with her. And it was not until the Bulls and others represented to him that if any harm had come to Bonnie, his indifference would go very much against him in a court of law, that he wakened up to a sense of the responsibility he was incurring and the danger he possibly ran. Then, self-preservation being the first law of nature, Mr. Kit Masters went off with a long face and a lugubrious tale of bereavement to the police station, and left a description of the missing girl for the benefit of the force. Which means resulted in his receiving information, on the second day, that a young woman answering the description of Bonnie

had been found in some fields near Putney on the night of the funeral, half frozen and nearly unconscious, and been taken to the Putney workhouse, where she awaited recognition, having been found most obstinate in refusing to give her name or address.

"Oh, she'll speak when she sees *me*, never fear," remarked Mr. Masters as he set off to see the girl who had been detained at Putney. It was Bonnie, sure enough! He knew it almost before he lifted his eyes to her face, by the scream of terror with which she saluted him, and the attempt she made to hide herself behind the matron, who had conducted him to her presence.

"She seems fairly skeered at the sight of you," remarked the matron, suspiciously, as she patted Bonnie kindly on the back. "Are you really her husband? She looks very young to be married."

"If you want to see the marriage lines, ma'am, I can go 'ome and fetch 'em," replied Kit Masters, sullenly. "But she's my wife, sure enough, and I might add, more's the pity, for I'm a 'ard-working man, and I 'aven't got the time to go skying over the country arter a woman who takes it into 'er 'ead to cut from 'ome for nothink at all."

"But there must have been some reason for her

running away. Had she any trouble? We have been quite unable to make her speak to us."

"Wall! her grandmother died, if that's to be called a trouble, mum," replied Kit, who felt he must be on his good behaviour in so public a place.

"Poor girl! perhaps she felt it more than you suspected. She is not very strong, you know, and you must take great care of her. Many women go off their heads a bit at times."

"Oh! I'll take care of 'er, mum, never fear. Come on, Bonnie," he continued! to his wife; "the cart's at the door, and we must get 'ome now. Thank the lady for takin' so much care of you, and promise 'er you won't play sich a foolish trick agen. You've kep' me on nice tenter-hooks for the last week—not knowing wheer you was."

He took her hand as he spoke, and she followed him, meek and silent as a lamb, but with a look of fear and distaste upon her face, which the matron declared haunted her memory for days afterwards.

"That man's a brute, if ever I see one," she decided in her own mind, as she gave poor Bonnie a farewell smile and nod.

The "brute" never spoke a word the whole way back to London, and his wife, inferring the very worst from his ominous silence, was in a state of

fear that rendered her more dead than alive, when he lifted her down from the cart before the door of their own house.

Half the neighbours were on the alert to witness their arrival, and the Bulls, with several other friends, crowded round Bonnie, as she reached the pavement, with many expressions of sympathy and inquiries as to where she had been and how she had fared. But Kit pushed the crowd to one side.

"Leave 'er alone!" he said peremptorily; "a faggot as runs away from 'er 'usband without rhyme or reason 'as got to answer to 'im fust for 'er be'aviour. I 'aven't talked to Bonnie myself yet. You'll please to leave 'er alone till I've finished."

And he pulled the girl into the shop after him as he spoke.

"Masters—Masters! take care what you're a-doing of!" cried Mrs. Bull. "I warns you as she ain't over-strong, and you'll rue the hour as you touches 'er."

The only answer Mr. Masters vouchsafed to this appeal was to consign Mrs. Bull to an unpleasantly warm retreat, and to slam the door in her face. Then he was alone with his wife, and there was no one to interfere between them. But Mrs. Bull kept on hammering at the outside of the door with violence enough to rouse the street.

"Let me in," she repeated vehemently, "or I'll send Bull for the police! You're not a man—you're a brute! and if you dare to touch that gal with as much as your little finger, I'll go into court and swear it agen you, as sure as my name's Jane Bull. Let me in, I say! She ain't fit to be trusted to your 'ands without a witness, and I promised her grandmother as I'd stand by 'er, and I will! Do you 'ear what I say, Kit Masters? I've summat to tell you, and if you don't open the door to me, I'll get the neighbours to stove it in!"

The noise she made had more effect upon Kit than any amount of threats. He was terribly afraid of the interference of the police, and they paced the little back street in Drury Lane pretty regularly. So he unlocked the door again, and, with a dogged air, asked the woman what she meant by kicking up that shindy before a decent man's house. But Mrs. Bull had pushed her portly person past him and thrown her arms round Bonnie before he had finished speaking, and thence she declared she'd never unclasp them until she'd brought Kit to his bearings.

"You may growl and swear as much as you like, Masters, but if you lay a 'and on this poor gal agen, Bull and me will be the fust to inform against you, and 'ave 'er purtected; so you can put that in

your pipe and smoke it. It's got to be a perfect scandal, and we ain't a-goin' to 'ave no more of it, so there!"

"Oh! you ain't, ain't yer?" sneered Kit.

"No! we ain't, and you can make what you like of it. 'Twould be a cryin' shame at any time to see 'er cuffed about as you cuffs 'er, but specially now. Why, wheer are your eyes, Masters? Can't you see as she's a mother?"

"A *what?*" said Kit Masters.

"A *mother?*" repeated Bonnie, with wide open eyes.

"In coorse you are, and heverybody knows it but your two selves. So, now, 'it 'er agen, Kit Masters, if you dare!"

"*I* shan't touch 'er," replied the man almost reluctantly, as he turned away and walked into old Mrs. Bell's little parlour.

Mrs. Bull saw that even his uncouth nature was temporarily softened by the intelligence she had given him, and that his wife was safe with him at all events for the present. So with a rough kiss to Bonnie and a whispered warning not to "haggeravate" him further, she returned to her own home, leaving the married couple alone with each other and the wonder of their new expectations.

CHAPTER V.

"YOU MUST PASS IT OFF AS YOUR OWN."

MRS. VIVIAN CHASEMORE did not ask her mother nor any other lady to live with her during the term of her husband's absence. Lady William Nettleship would have been delighted to have made her way into her daughter's house, and to have established some sort of authority there; but Regina foresaw too well the difficulty of ever getting rid of her again, to give any encouragement to the many hints which she threw out upon the subject. Yet she always took the greatest care, before issuing invitations for a party, to ascertain if Lady William would be able to assist her in entertaining her guests, for the whole of her social life, whilst Vivian was away, was conducted upon principles of the strictest propriety. How was it likely to be otherwise? Regina had no religion to keep her straight, but the very coldness which distressed her husband and made her so unsympathetic a wife, stood her in excellent stead as a young and beautiful hostess, dispensing hospitality without the protection of a husband's presence.

No one ever had it in their power to breathe a word against the complete decorum of Mrs. Vivian

Chasemore. She never received a gentleman alone except it was during an afternoon call, neither did she ever appear in public without being accompanied by some lady older than herself. The season came on apace, and the temptations to "gad about" were numerous. Still, Regina resisted every one that she was unable to accept under the chaperonage of Lady William, and was quoted as the most reticent and discreet of all young wives ever left to pass through a London season by themselves. Whether she enjoyed the life she had resolved upon leading, it is not so easy to determine. Her hours at home were passed in a very lackadaisical and useless manner. She had never cared for needlework, and she exhausted the contents of the libraries as fast as they were produced. She found it very dull driving about alone, or in company with her mother, whose sentiments had never tallied well with hers; but it was still duller to remain indoors by herself. She missed her husband's society more than she chose to acknowledge, especially in the evenings, and any lady friend who dropped in to see her after her solitary dinner was always very sincerely welcomed by Mrs. Vivian Chasemore. Amongst those acquaintances who had thus re-established an intimacy with her, was Miss Selina *Farthingale*, who found the house in Premier Street

a very pleasant lounge in the evenings, especially since her father had taken to spending them away from home. Lady William Nettleship was not so frequent a visitor after dark, unless she came by special invitation. Regina set her face against cards, and refused to receive Mrs. Runnymede, so that her mother found it was so much time wasted to dance attendance on her daughter's solitude.

But Selina grew to be a standing dish there, and the proud Regina, who had despised the friendship of the lawyer's daughter in her earlier days, ended by making quite a confidante of Miss Farthingale. After all, they were much of the same age and standing in society, and it is very bad for a woman to bear pain and disappointment entirely by herself. Regina felt her husband's desertion to be a great injury and insult, and she could not forbear imparting her feelings on the subject to Selina. Thus the original cause of the quarrel was brought forward, and the name of Mrs. General Chasemore came on the *tapis*.

Miss Farthingale appeared to sympathise entirely with her friend's sense of wrong, and the absent Vivian came in for no small share of blame between them. Selina was ready to believe Mrs. General Chasemore to be a much injured woman, and coun-

selling Regina to find out the rights and wrongs of the whole matter for herself.

Consequently, when it happened that the lawyer's daughter and the General's widow met by accident in Regina's house, it was only natural that she should introduce them to one another. She fancied that the elder lady looked startled when she first pronounced Selina's name, but concluded she must have been mistaken, as they had evidently never met before. Friendship, however, seemed to spring up between them as if by magic. Mrs. General Chasemore raved over Selina's appearance, manners, and accomplishments, whilst Miss Farthingale pronounced her new acquaintance to be the most charming, clever, and conversational person she had ever known. Regina could not join, with sincerity, in her commendations. Her husband's stepmother was just the sort of woman she had always set her face resolutely against, and she only tolerated her familiarity from a feeling of rebellion against Vivian, a determination to have her own way, and a curiosity to learn little by little every detail of her husband's former life, which, when probed, Mrs. General Chasemore seemed to know very little about. But then it was too late to retreat from the intimacy she had allowed her to establish.

One afternoon Regina was sitting in her own

room with a very uncomfortable feeling called fear knocking at her heart. Dr. Morton had not heard until that morning that his patient had taken French leave, and left Ventnor for Norway, and he had called on her to ascertain if the news were true.

When she had informed him that it was so, and that her husband's stay in the North was likely to be indefinitely prolonged, the medical man had shaken his head and said he was very sorry, and he wished he had been apprised of Mr. Chasemore's intention before he put it into execution.

"Mr. Chasemore is not usually very open to persuasion, Dr. Morton, when it runs in a contrary direction to his own wishes; but may I ask why you seem to attach any importance to this last freak of his? It is becoming a very usual expedition, I believe, with the young men of the present day."

"Oh yes, certainly! and nothing more delightful, I should imagine, for a man in full health. But though I do not wish to alarm you, Mrs. Chasemore, I must tell you that I did not quite like the sound of your husband's lungs the last time I applied the stethoscope to them. That was the reason I sent him to Ventnor, from whence I quite expected he would return to London. The summer months may not signify so much, but I should say that an autumn and winter on the coast of Norway might be very

deleterious to him. I trust you will persuade him to return before then."

"I will mention your opinion to him when I write," replied Regina, who was anxious not to let the doctor guess under what circumstances she and Vivian had parted with each other; "but I am much afraid there is little chance of anything I can say making Mr. Chasemore alter his plans. I hope you do not think him *really ill!*"

There was true concern in the tone with which she uttered those words, for danger to her husband meant poverty for herself; but Dr. Morton naturally attributed her anxiety to her conjugal affection.

"Not exactly ill, perhaps, but his health is delicate, and requires attention. The severe chill he took on the occasion of his last attack most certainly left a little dulness in the lungs. I should have preferred his putting off this fishing expedition till next year, but as you justly observe, young men are apt to be headstrong patients, and fond of having their own way. But you may as well give Mr. Chasemore a hint of what I say, and appeal to his good sense to return to a warmer climate before the autumn sets in. I am glad to see you looking so well yourself. Good-morning!" and Dr. Morton quitted the apartment, leaving Regina with an intolerable headache and the uncomfortable sensation before alluded

to, as sole company. He might think she looked well, but she did not feel so. The spectre that had haunted her at intervals ever since the day on which she learned that it was not in her husband's power to make any settlements upon her, rose up more hideous in her eyes than ever to confront and alarm her. She had told the doctor calmly enough that she would write and try to dissuade Vivian from passing too long a time from home; but the fact was that since she had received those few cold lines from Ventnor, she had never heard from him, and had no notion of his address. Lord Charlesford's yacht was likely to be cruising here, there, and everywhere, and its occupants to have no settled residence until their return. And even if she knew where to write, would any arguments she could use have an effect upon Vivian in his present state of mind towards her? Would he not detect the reason of her apparent anxiety for his welfare, and throw her mercenary motives back in her teeth? Would he not say that she had made life worthless to him, and the sooner he got rid of it the better?—she believed that he would. She knew his hasty passionate nature, and how difficult it was for him to forgive and forget a slight to his affections. So she sat alone all the afternoon, declining any of the services of Mrs. Perkins's successor, whilst she conjured

up fear after fear, and pictured to herself Vivian being lost at sea, or dying of a second attack upon the lungs, and leaving her a widow upon the miserable interest of ten thousand pounds; whilst that "brute," Sir Arthur, walked off with all the luxuries she had grown to believe were necessary to her. Such dismal reflections were not calculated to make her headache better, and when dinner was announced, she declined to descend to the dining-room, and ordered tea to be served in her boudoir instead. As she was in the midst of it, Mrs. General Chasemore was announced, and Regina was thankful to welcome any one who would serve as a distraction to her unpleasant thoughts. Besides, Mrs. Chasemore was a sort of relation, and knew so much of the family affairs that she had no hesitation in telling her every word that Dr. Morton had said.

"Fancy, how wrong and imprudent it is of Vivian to have joined in such an expedition, under the circumstances! So selfish too! Not a thought of what would become of me if he never returned. I had no idea Morton considered his lungs affected. No one mentioned it to me. If they had, I should have sent him down to Ventnor as soon as ever I received the news of Vivian's intended departure."

"Ah, my dear! all men are the same! They can *think* of no one but themselves. But this sounds

serious about Vivian's lungs. I remember now that the poor General told me he used to consider his chest delicate as a boy."

"Oh, you don't mean to say so!" cried Regina, clasping her hands in her apprehension. "I think it is quite wicked that I should never have been informed of all this before. And the conditions of Sir Peregrine's will even were never disclosed to me until after I had committed myself by accepting his proposals. I think I am a very deceived and injured woman!"

"It will certainly be a great misfortune for you, my dear, if your husband never comes back again. What is the interest of ten thousand pounds in consols?—From three to four hundred a year! Sheer beggary! And when you have been used to so much luxury too," quoth Mrs. General Chasemore, as she sipped her tea out of a cup of exquisite Japanese china.

Regina was ready to cry at the prospect. "Oh, it cannot be!—it cannot possibly be!" she whimpered. "I should never survive the humiliation."

"And all for the want of a child to inherit too," continued the elder lady; "that is the aggravating part of it. It's enough to make a woman——"

"*What?*" inquired Regina, finding she did not proceed.

"Well, I dare say you'll be shocked at what I am going to say, my dear; but it seems that the circumstances are so very peculiar that they entirely alter the case, and I've often wondered of late why it has never entered your own head."

"But I don't understand what you mean," said Regina.

Mrs. General Chasemore glanced back to see if the door were closed fast before she entered into explanations.

"I have often wondered why, since there seems no prospect of an heir, that you don't substitute one."

"Substitute one! Adopt another woman's baby, do you mean?"

"Hush! don't talk so loud, or we may be overheard. Yes, that is what I meant."

"But in case of Vivian's death they wouldn't give the money to an adopted child, would they?"

"No, no, you goose! of course not; but what need to say it was adopted. You must pass it off as your own."

"Oh, everybody would find that out."

"Not if you're a clever woman! A woman with brains can do anything she chooses in this world. *It would only require a little plotting and planning, and a little help.* You couldn't do it alone."

"I could never do it at all. Vivian would discover the fraud at once, and never forgive me for it!"

"What! when he is out in Norway, from which the doctor hints he is unlikely to return? You'll not have such another opportunity, my dear, as long as you live. The man's out of the way for a clear twelve-month, and you have the field to yourself. Why, it would be as easy as possible! All you would have to do would be to go away for a while, and come back with the baby. Do you suppose Vivian is such a conjuror that he will be able to tell at a glance that the child is none of his? No, no, my dear! trust to me. 'It's a wise child,' they say, 'that knows its own father;' but depend upon it, it's a much wiser father that knows his own child."

Regina sat silent, ruminating on her companion's words. The proposition was too startling a one to strike her at first sight with anything but dismay. Before Mrs. Chasemore had time to continue her discourse, Miss Farthingale walked into the room.

"Ah! here is our dear Selina!" exclaimed the general's widow. "She and I were talking over this very subject yesterday afternoon, and we mutually agreed that it would be the most feasible thing in the world."

"I am much obliged to you and Selina, for tak-

ing so much interest in my private affairs," replied Regina haughtily. She did not like the idea of so delicate a matter having been discussed by these two women, and her pride was roused at once.

"What is it all about?" said Selina, looking from one friend to the other.

"Dear Regina has been very much upset this afternoon by Dr. Morton telling her that he considers Vivian's lungs unsound, and that he runs a great risk in going to Norway. You know what a terrible thing it will be for her if he goes and dies out there, and leaves her without any one to inherit all these beautiful things—to say nothing of the money!"

"Except that odious creature Sir Arthur," interposed Selina.

"Just so. A man who has neither generosity nor good feeling, and would be delighted to have an opportunity of revenging himself on the lady who had refused the honour of his hand. It would break my heart to see our dear Regina left to the mercy of the baronet—living, as you may say, on his charity, for he will never let her forget that her wretched pittance is derived from his money!"

"It would be intolerable!" murmured Regina, as she laid her head down upon her hands.

"I would rather break stones upon the road my-

self!" rejoined Selina. "And I would do *anything* to spite Sir Arthur, and keep him out of the property; so you may depend upon my aid, dear, whenever it may be required."

"Mrs. Chasemore has been making the most monstrous proposal to me," said Regina, looking up with a sickly smile; "but it is utterly impossible!"

"I don't see that at all," said Selina stoutly.

"Have you heard it, then?"

"We were talking it all over yesterday, as she has just told you. I know what *I* should do in such a case. No doubts nor fears should stop me, for after all, if it *were* found out, no one is likely to prosecute a lady in your position. Besides, how should it be?"

"Oh, people tell these things. The servants would be the first to betray me."

"You mustn't trust servants. No one should know it but a couple of real friends like your mother-in-law and myself. It would be as easy as A B C, if you only tried it."

"It is not to be thought of," returned Regina; yet she did think of it again and again whilst her friends were with her, although she resolutely turned the conversation to other topics.

Miss Farthingale was obliged to be home by ten o'clock that evening, and as the hour approached,

she rose to go. As she kissed Regina at parting, she whispered:

"Don't be such a zany, my dear, as to let all that money slip through your fingers for the want of a little pluck!"

And Regina answered earnestly:

"I will speak to you about it again, but whatever you do, mention it to no one;" and then she returned thoughtfully to the boudoir, whence Mrs. General Chasemore showed no signs of an immediate removal.

"I am glad that girl is gone, my dear. She is a good girl, and quite devoted to you, and you may trust her as you would myself; but I want to have a little talk alone with you. You must think over what I said to you, Regina. Things are looking very serious; and if you don't make an effort to help yourself now, you may never have another opportunity. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do for you, if you like. I'll accompany you abroad as soon as the season is over, and we'll manage the matter quietly there. If Vivian finds out that you were with me at the time, he can but scold you for disobedience; for after all, I am his father's widow, and there's no harm in your being seen with me; but the chances *are*, that he'll be so delighted at the idea of having

a son and heir, that he'll be able to think of nothing else."

"Do you think he would be so very much pleased then?"

"I don't *think*—I'm sure of it! Nothing sours a man's temper like having no children, especially under such circumstances as his. I shouldn't wonder if all your late differences have arisen from that cause. It's very unfair, of course, but it often sets a man against his wife. It's so unusual!"

"Yes, so it is," acquiesced Regina, with a sigh.

"Well, you have no power to remedy it in the right way, my dear, and so I really think you would be quite justified in doing the next best thing you can for yourself. It will be quite a pious fraud, I am sure, for it will give Vivian no end of pleasure, and secure you the advantages that should be yours by right. And if your husband doesn't return, why, it will be simply invaluable to you!"

"But—but—how could I manage about—about—the baby?" jerked out Regina, after much hesitation.

"I'll manage that, my dear; you must have nothing to do with it. You mustn't appear in the matter, so as to render after-recognition an impossibility."

"But won't it be very difficult?"

"Difficult!" echoed Mrs. General Chasemore, with a hoarse laugh. "What, in this big, overgrown Babylon, teeming with its hundreds and thousands of wretched little brats that come into the world, unwanted and unwelcome! If I wished for a dozen to-morrow, I could procure them all by noon. But it requires caution, my dear—great caution. The child must be newborn, the parents must not know to whom they have sold it, and they must imagine it is going out of the country. Then there will be no chance of their coming in contact with or recognising it again. But you know what young babies are—all alike! There will be no difficulty in the matter at all."

"I wish I could think so," said Regina; "it would take such a load off my breast."

"If that is the case, think so, and be relieved. I would not deceive you for the world! Now, just picture it for yourself. You have not been well all the season. The heat has tried you, and you feel you will be better for a change. You go abroad with me. After a while, you write home to your mother, and tell her you have expectations. We post the letter at one place, and move on to another, without leaving our address. That is in case she takes it into her head to follow and nurse you. *Then, at the proper time, we write and say that all*

is over, and a few months afterwards you return home with your child in state! Where is the difficulty?"

"But where shall we get the child?"

"I have already said leave that to me! Selina and I will manage it between us. We may profess to be in Rome, or the Pyrenees, or any inaccessible place; but we need not go farther than Paris; and, when necessary, I can return and take the infant over. You can meet me somewhere on the road, and we will go to some quiet town together, and pretend we have parted with the child's nurse in a hurry, and want another. We will have it baptised and registered abroad in your husband's name, and the deed will be done."

"They won't make inquiries about doctors and so forth, will they?"

"It's not customary upon such occasions; but if you think it probable, I shall have my story ready. You travelled too much, and were taken ill at a roadside inn, all alone with me."

"How clever you are!" said Regina.

"I believe I am; but this will be child's play to me. I would go through a much greater risk than that to secure your welfare, Regina. It seems a shame to me that Vivian, whose whole existence has been one course of selfishness, should enjoy this

money for his lifetime, and then leave you almost penniless—and that for no fault of your own!”

“It does seem hard, doesn’t it? But I don’t think it troubles Vivian much. He is tired of me already. I am sure of it!”

“Ah, my dear, you’ll see the difference this blessed baby will make! Nothing will be good enough for you then. You’ll be the most beautiful and charming and angelic woman in creation, and all you do and say will be ‘wisest, discreetest, virtuest, and best!’ I really think you owe it to Vivian as well as yourself to procure him this enjoyment. He’ll never be the wiser; and ‘where ignorance is bliss,’ you know, ‘’tis folly,’ etc., etc. No one will be the worse either, unless it is that covetous creature the baronet; and I’d do it to spite him, if for no better reason.”

“I believe you really wish to help me,” murmured Regina, “but it seems a great risk to run.”

“Oh! you are faint-hearted over the idea to-day because it is new to you, but wait till to-morrow my dear, and you’ll see it in a different light. Well, I mustn’t stay longer now, or I shall be locked out of my rooms, so good-night, and don’t be such a fool as to have any scruples at out-witting Sir Arthur.”

Both her friends had left her with the same

warning on their lips, and their words rung in her ears through the ensuing night. What was the feeling that actuated Regina most as she contemplated the possibility of carrying out the fraud they had suggested to her? Was it altogether the idea of securing the benefit of Sir Peregrine's fortune for her life-time, or was it the hope of reviving her husband's affection for and pride in her, and of raising her graceful head amongst the females of her acquaintance, crowned with the glory of maternity (although a spurious one)? I think the last arguments had the greater weight with her. Regina was not so cold and heartless as she loved to believe herself, and make others believe her to be. The touch of a baby's hands and lips might have moulded her very differently by this time, and disappointment and the natural shame which every woman feels at being childless, had had a large share in hardening the character which marriage and motherhood might otherwise have contributed to soften.

She lay awake all night, conning over the feasibility of putting the plan which Mrs. General Chase-more had suggested to her into execution, until it seemed to be the only way out of the difficulties that environed her, and from being impossible and not to be thought of, suddenly assumed an appear-

ance of the greatest desirability. A few hours before she had recoiled at the mere idea of practising such a vast deception; now she longed to put it into progress at once, and end her apprehensions and suspense. So easily does the evil spirit that divides the possession of every human nature with Heaven gain a victory over the voice of conscience and still its remonstrances with an almighty "*must*."

CHAPTER VI.

"CAN WE HOLD OUR TONGUES?"

THE two arch-conspirators in this pretty little plot held many a consultation upon ways and means, whilst they left their victim to brood over and digest all they had said to her. For some reason of her own, Mrs. General Chasemore declined to meet Selina at her father's house, but the young lady was her own mistress, and had every opportunity of holding appointments with her friends elsewhere.

"Of course, I need not tell you that we must take every precaution to preserve an inviolable secrecy in this matter," said Mrs. Chasemore one day, as they paced together beneath the shade of *the trees* in Hyde Park, "for our own sakes as well

as Regina's—and the chief question is, 'Can we hold our tongues?'

By which she meant, of course, "Can *you* hold *your* tongue?" as she looked at Selina with her big watery blue eyes.

"Well, if we engage in it, I suppose we should naturally do that for our own sakes. I am not sure that, if discovered, it wouldn't be brought in something like felony. There was a case of the same sort the other day, you know!"

"Ah! yes! but there the husband prosecuted, and Vivian would never do that. He is as proud as she is! The only danger of discovery lies with ourselves."

"I don't fear that at all," said Selina. "What *I* think of most, is the amount of good we shall gain by interfering in the affair. It is of very little moment to us, after all, *who* gets the money, and Regina herself was never any particular friend of mine."

"Perhaps not! but you like the baronet still less, if I have understood you rightly. For my own part I am interesting myself in the matter purely to help poor Regina. I know what Vivian is, and I can't help pitying her. And she couldn't possibly manage it by herself."

"No! but she is clever enough to find plenty of people who would help her!"

"True! and those people would derive all the advantages of keeping her secret. For there *will* be advantages, my dear Selina! over and above a nice trip abroad for both of us. The fact that it is in our power at any moment to betray her, will gain us a very substantial footing in the house, and a liberal share in the luxuries we have planned to enable her to retain. As it should do, for it is not to be expected that we should risk our reputations to so serious an extent and receive nothing in exchange," said Mrs. General Chasemore, with the air of a woman who had a reputation to risk.

"Of course not," replied Selina, "and, as you say, there must be advantages in obliging a woman with such a command of money. Have you spoken to Regina again about it?"

"Yes! I was with her last evening, and we settled that we would leave town together the end of the month. The sooner it is all over now, I think the better. Then, if you can manage your part of the business and get your papa's consent, you can join us as soon as it is convenient to yourself."

"I have no one's consent to ask," replied Selina. "I have long ceased to consult my father about any of my private arrangements, and it will only be necessary for me to tell him I have been invited to *join Mrs. Vivian Chasemore* abroad to render all

that part easy. The only doubt I have is about the other thing."

"If there should be any difficulty on that score, I will return to England and fetch it myself. But the only real fear is lest your identity should be discovered during the transaction."

"I will take care of that! I know how to disguise myself so that my own father shall not recognise me in the street. It is to whom to apply first that has puzzled me. But I have thought of some one."

"Who is that?"

"Do you remember my telling you that when he was searching for Vivian Chasemore, papa offered a reward of fifty pounds in the newspapers to any one who should send information of his whereabouts? The information came through an anonymous letter, but the writer said that if correct he would present himself at papa's office later on with a copy of the letter sent, to prove his identity and claim the reward."

"Yes! I think you did tell me so, and I remarked that I wouldn't have offered fifty pence for the scrapegrace."

"Papa told me that Mr. Chasemore was as curious as himself to find out who the writer of the letter could possibly be; and when a month afterwards he

called for the money, he insisted upon first having his name and address. He gave some name (I forget it now, but I can easily get it out of papa) which neither he nor Mr. Chasemore had ever heard of before. They sent to the address given, however, and verified the man's story, so they had no excuse for withholding the reward from him, although they could not make him confess how he had obtained the information that the actor Waverley was Vivian Chasemore. He was doggedly reserved, and to all their questions only replied that he had guessed it somehow."

"Well, my dear, what has this got to do with our present business?"

"Because I've often heard papa say since in alluding to that man, that he'd never met with a more impenetrable-looking countenance, and that if he had any secret work to do and wanted a confederate, *he* is the person he would choose. So I thought it would be a good idea to apply to him."

"Capital! You couldn't do better! And if he kept his mouth so firmly closed for fifty pounds, what will he not do for a hundred? Are you sure you can get at his name without suspicion?"

"Sure! Papa keeps all his correspondence papers at home, and I have continual access to his keys. *He* generally leaves them with me when he spends

the evening out. I shall know the name long before I need it."

"It will be better not to apply to this person too soon."

"I don't mean to do so! I suppose a week will be ample time to give him for his search. My greatest difficulty is to know what to do with the creature when I've got it."

"My dear, you must bring it straight to me! I shall return to England for the occasion. I've quite decided upon that. The responsibility will be too great for you alone. But you had better fetch the thing away. With your small, slight figure you are so much more easily disguised than I am. And then I know means by which to keep it quiet until we have rejoined Regina."

"How uncommonly strange she will feel with it," laughed Selina.

"Oh, she will soon get over that! But you must make one very strict condition, Selina: that the child is perfectly healthy. Don't be let in for some sickly brat who will die after all, and waste both our time and trouble."

"Mrs. Chasemore! why run the risk of conveying a child over from England? There must be heaps of French brats that would answer the purpose!"

"No, my dear, there are not! The national cha-

racteristics are too strongly marked. A French or Italian child might excite suspicion at once. The boy must be English and blue-eyed. Besides, the English poor are far more likely to part with their offspring than foreigners. See the numbers of infanticides we have and the way in which our Foundling Hospital is kept stocked. It is very inconvenient, I own, but it is quite necessary that the child should be transplanted from this country."

"I shall not mind it so much, since you have promised to return to assist me; but I confess I felt very unequal to carrying out that part of the plan by myself."

The season ended that month, and with the prorogation of Parliament Regina slipped away from London with Mrs. General Chasemore, leaving only a letter behind for her mother, to say that she felt so ill she had suddenly made up her mind to go abroad for a few weeks' change with a "lady friend," and had no time to call in Kensington before her departure. Selina, who was left in town, was condemned to listen to many a tirade from Lady William's lips on the ingratitude of her daughter at not having acquainted her earlier with her plans.

"No time to call, indeed," said the irate mother; "what a ridiculous excuse for a woman to make who has a carriage and a couple of horses continually

at her disposal! It really makes me feel quite ashamed of my own flesh and blood. And who is this 'lady friend' with whom Mrs. Vivian Chasemore has so suddenly made up her mind to leave England without even taking the trouble to say 'good-bye' to her poor mother? What is her name, Selina Farthingale, and where does she come from? Please to tell me that."

"Indeed I cannot tell you anything, Lady William! Regina has not so much as written me a note! Why should she? We all know that fashionable women have their little fancies on occasions, and where money is no obstacle they are likely to gratify them. I suppose she did go off in a great hurry at the last, and had no time to think of anything."

"Very pretty behaviour indeed! If she wanted some one to accompany her, why didn't she ask her mother? A few weeks' change would have done me a world of good as well as herself. But I am no one, of course! and never was in Miss Regina's consideration."

"I am sure she has been looking very ill all the season, Lady William, and has lost flesh considerably. I can't imagine what is the matter with her," replied Selina, who had been coached as to what she should say and do, by Mrs. General Chasemore.

"Fretting after the gentleman in Norway per-

haps," remarked Mrs. Runnymede sarcastically. "That is the way with women. They never value a thing until they've lost it."

"More likely worrying herself about 'the missing heir'," chimed in Lady William spitefully; "though crying never remedied that evil yet. She had much better resign herself to the inevitable with a good grace!"

"I have not heard Regina utter a complaint on that score lately," said Selina; "and, after all, Mr. Chasemore's life is as good as her own."

"No, my dear, it isn't! The lives of no men are as good as those of women. We are much the tougher sex of the two, though it isn't romantic to proclaim it. However, if anything happens to Vivian, Regina must manage for herself. I can't have her coming back upon me. Our tastes never did agree and never will. She was trying enough, I'm sure, as a girl, and I'm quite afraid to think what she would be as a married woman."

"Pray don't talk of such a melancholy contingency, dear Lady William. Mr. Chasemore is the picture of health as a rule, and we must hope they have both long lives before them."

"Ah! you don't know as much as I do, my dear. Those "pictures of health" are just the ones to pop off most suddenly, and I've had a presentiment of

evil ever since Regina was such a fool as to marry without any proper settlements."

"But if he does die she'll soon find another husband," remarked Selina, with that beautiful disregard of all that is sacred with which the young ladies of the present century are wont to invest the order of matrimony.

Lady William nodded her head oracularly.

"Perhaps she may; but it's not every woman that gets a second chance. However, if Regina does not, it won't be for want of trying."

With which dubious compliment to her only-born, Lady William Nettleship returned to the contemplation of her game of cards.

But about a week afterwards, when Regina had been a month on the Continent, and Lady William and Mrs. Runnymede were thinking of betaking their wicked selves over to Boulogne or Ostend or some one of the cheaper watering-places, where a game of *baccarat* or *rouge et noir* is still to be enjoyed in a strictly quiet way, Miss Farthingale was surprised by the very unusual sight of seeing them both enter her quiet drawing-room.

"My dear Lady William, how very good of you! This is a welcome surprise."

"My dear, we've just run over to say good-bye to you—and to tell you the most wonderful piece of

news. Runnymede and I have secured rooms at Ostend, where there's an excellent Kursaal, and we intended to start to-morrow, but I've received a letter from Regina that's upset me entirely. What do you think?—but you'd never guess—it's quite impossible."

"Good news I hope, Lady William! Let me try. Mr. Chasemore is coming home again!"

"As if *that* would upset any one! Why, my dear Selina, you know they don't care a straw for each other. Oh no! you're quite wide of the mark."

"What *can* it be? Nobody left her any money?"

"Not a bit of it! There is no one who could do it. But it means money all the same."

Selina affected to be completely mystified.

"I suppose I must tell you after all. There are expectations, my dear, of an heir!"

"Oh *never!*" cried Selina, leaping in her chair.

"Indeed there are, at least Regina seems to have no doubt of it, and I don't suppose she'd be such a fool as to make the news public unless she were sure. She says that this accounts for a great deal of illness and low spirits for months past, of which she has never complained to me, and that she is already feeling better for the welcome prospect."

"Dear Lady William, how delighted you must be! Do let me congratulate you and dear Regina! I suppose you will be going to her at once."

"I don't know. She does not seem to be quite sure what she is going to do herself. She says the Paris doctors have recommended her country air, and she is going into the Tyrol with her friend, whom she calls Mrs. Brownlow. Did you ever meet a Mrs. Brownlow in Premier Street, Selina?" continued Lady William, suspiciously.

"I'm not sure. Yes, I think I did once. A nice old lady with white hair. Is that the same?"

"I cannot tell you. My daughter's friends are not mine. At any rate Regina seems to prefer Mrs. Brownlow's company to her mother's. Did I hear you say that you had been invited to join my daughter later on, Selina?"

"She did ask me to do so—but perhaps after this news she may wish to postpone my visit. She will have other things to think of besides entertaining her friends. And Mr. Chasemore will be returning home, surely."

"I don't know. Regina doesn't mention him, nor the date that she expects this important event to take place, nor anything except the bare fact. That is her unpleasant way you know. She never could write a satisfactory letter."

"I suppose her mind was too full of the important news to think of anything else. Everything would appear of trivial consequence after that! But

does she mention no probable time for her return to England?

"Not a word, so I shall alter none of my plans on her account. I conclude, of course, that she has written to her husband, and I hope he may come home and look after her himself. It's his business and not mine. But I thought I mustn't leave England without telling you of her prospects, though there's many a slip, you know, 'twixt the cup and the lip. So, good-bye, my dear, and should you decide, after all, to pay Regina a visit, of course you will let me know."

To hear Lady William talk one would really have imagined that she was annoyed, rather than pleased, to hear that her daughter's ardent wishes were to be at last fulfilled. Whether the Vivian Chasemores did or did not have an heir to inherit their property, could make no real difference to her personal interests, but it would deprive her of the questionable pleasure of lamenting over her daughter's disappointment and abusing dead Sir Peregrine for having made so infamous a will. There are some people—a good many, unfortunately—who cease to care for their friends as soon as they are prosperous. Whilst they are wicked or poor, and *can* be condemned or commiserated, they are so *much* stock-in-trade to them; but let them once

return to the paths of virtue or rise above want, and they are no longer worth talking about. Selina acquiesced in all Lady William said, although she had not the least intention of acquainting her with any of her own plans beforehand.

"It is so much easier to invent what one *has* done than what one is going to do," she decided in mental cogitation with herself. But the intelligence that the first shell had been fired into the enemy's camp, roused her to the fact that her turn for action would arrive before long. "Regina has been cunning enough, I see, not to commit herself by mentioning any dates; so that I am to wait orders, I suppose, before I take action in the matter."

Nothing could have happened more favourably than it had done for the carrying out of the contemplated fraud. Mr. Farthingale invariably took his month's holiday in August, and Selina's avowed intention of shortly joining her friend Mrs. Vivian Chasemore on the continent, was sufficient excuse for her staying behind him in company with the woman left in charge of the house. Before his departure, however, she had obtained the address she needed, and without the slightest difficulty. In days gone by, when Mr. Farthingale and his daughter had been closer friends than at present, Selina had

greatly aided her father's home work by writing and copying letters for him, and he had continued the habit of confiding his keys to her care whenever he spent an evening from home. One such opportunity had proved sufficient for her; and amongst a pile of receipts, docketed by her own hand, she had found that for the fifty pounds' reward given for the information of Vivian Chasemore's address, and signed by "Joseph Mason, 8, Victoria Cottages, Richmond." To Mr. Mason, therefore, she was quite prepared to pay a visit as soon as she received her cue from Mrs. General Chasemore. It was not long in coming. Before another week elapsed she had a note to say her friend was about to cross to Dover, and would be ready to join her as soon as she telegraphed that she had succeeded in her object. The same afternoon, therefore, found Miss Farthingale on her road to Richmond. She had boasted to Mrs. Chasemore that she could disguise herself so that her own father should not know her in the street, and the boast was true. No one would have recognised in the grey-haired, spectacled woman in "decent black," who took her seat in the Richmond omnibus that afternoon, the gay, flaunting Selina Farthingale. She carried her own latch-key, and *had taken care to send the char-woman on a distant errand before she left home; so that she slipped*

up the area-steps without any notice being taken of her. When she arrived in Richmond she had some little difficulty in finding Victoria Cottages, and it was past six o'clock when she came upon them, and found Mr. Joseph Mason with a chubby child on either knee, eating his supper at his castle-door. Selina felt that some policy was required in opening the delicate business she had come upon, and beat about the bush accordingly.

"You are Mr. Joseph Mason, I believe?" she commenced politely.

"Yes, ma'am, that be my name," responded Mr. Mason, as he rose to his feet and let the two youngsters slide down upon the floor, where they clung round his ancles like leeches.

"Pray don't let me disturb you! I am in want of a sensible and trustworthy person, Mr. Mason, to assist in a very delicate undertaking, and you have been specially recommended to me."

"Yes, ma'am!" said Mr. Mason, pulling his forelock. "I'm sure I'm much obliged. I suppose it's rockery, ma'am. I believe I *am* thought to be an able 'and at rockery and sich-like work."

"Oh no! it's not rockery."

"Fancy gardening, ma'am, p'r'aps. I can't take a job by the day, jest at present, because they're a-laying out of the hotel-gardins afresh, and I'm en-

gaged there by the week; but I could give a goodish bit of time hafter hours, if that would suit you, till I was free."

"No; my business with you has nothing to do with gardening."

Mr. Mason stared. He couldn't imagine what other business he was good for.

"I have been recommended to you by the firm of Farthingale and Lucas, in the City, as a very shrewd and able man to do a little job for me in which I need assistance."

"Farthingale and Lucas, mum! Be they the lawyers' (Mr. Mason pronounced it "liars") "as I seed once on account of a friend, now better'n two years and more ago?"

"You saw them on account of yourself, I think. You received a reward of fifty pounds from them for finding a gentleman they had lost sight of, and signed the receipt for it. Don't you remember?"

"Oh yes, mum, sure enuff!" responded the man, reddening to his ears like a peony.

"Mr. Farthingale thought you showed so much good sense and skill on that occasion that he recommended me to come to you to help me in a little difficulty of the same sort."

"Another genelman lost?" said Mr. Mason interrogatively.

"Not exactly. Something is to be procured this time. But I cannot speak to you of it here. It must be kept a complete secret, and you will be paid handsomely for holding your tongue."

Mr. Mason responded to this appeal by shoving his two youngsters out into a back-garden, and slipping the bolt of the door.

"You'll be as safe to speak here, mum, as anywhere, for my good woman's gone with the youngest to see her mother who's bin took sick, and there's no one within call but them two little 'uns."

"It is because of the cleverness you showed in finding that gentleman that I have come to you, Mr. Mason," repeated Selina, emphatically, "and because the lawyer said you knew so well how to hold your tongue."

"Well, mum, I can do that when I sees fit; and I never was a man of many words."

"Just so. I come on behalf of a lady, a foreign countess, very rich and good, who wants to adopt a little English boy; and she is willing to give a hundred pounds down to any one who will procure her a healthy newborn male infant with fair complexion and blue eyes."

"*A hundred pounds!*" ejaculated Mason. "Well, some folks can't know what to do with their money, mum. A hundred pounds! I only wish I had a

youngster of the age, I'd soon bundle 'im off, I know! And when would they require the child, mum?"

"In a week or two. The countess will send a person expressly to England to receive it and pay the money; but the parents of the child must understand that it is going far away, right out of the country, perhaps to Mexico, and that they will never see it again."

"Oh, they're not likely to want to!" said Mason, disposing of that difficulty as if it were too absurd to mention. "The only question in my eyes is the time. However, mum, if you'll leave it to me and a fren' as I've got—a very 'cute and able man, as has allays got his weather eye open—I fancy I'll 'ave news for you in a few days."

"But how shall you be able to let me know?"

"Couldn't you leave your address, mum?"

But Selina was too astute to leave even a false address.

"I have none. I return to the countess to-night, but I can fix a day to meet you here again. Will this day week do?"

"I've no fear but what we'll have news for you by that time, mum; but I wouldn't like to ask you to come here, for though my wife's a good enough woman in her way, yet they all have tongues, and

precious long 'uns too! saving your presence, mum; and if she once got hold of a tit-bit like this here, she wouldn't rest till she'd told it round Richmond."

"Oh, that will never do! Is there any place in London where I could see you privately?"

"Well, that's jest what I was a-thinking of, mum. Do ye happen to know a tripe shop at the corner of Bull's Court, jest a-runnin' out of Long Acre?"

Selina did not happen to know the aristocratic domicile in question, but she promised to find it in pursuit of Mr. Mason.

"Well, if you can do that, mum, my fren' and I will meet you there this day week, and talk with ye private over this matter, and say whether it will be possible to do it at the price. I s'pose the foreign parties wouldn't go over a hundred pounds at a stretch now, would they?"

"No, certainly not!" replied Selina, with decision. She had been warned by Mrs. General Chase-more that as soon as ever the object of her search became known, parental affection would go up to a premium, and her abettors would attempt to impose upon her. "A hundred pounds is more than enough for a newborn infant."

"Ay, but you were so particular about the colour

of the hair and eyes, that I thought there might be a difficulty you see, mum. And it must be a boy, too! 'Tain't as if the parties were willin' to take anythink!"

"Yes, it must be a boy, and a strong, healthy child into the bargain. Nothing else will do. So if you think you can't undertake the job, let me know, and I will go elsewhere."

But this threat was too much for Mr. Mason. He promised faithfully to meet the lady at the tripe shop in Bull Court on the day in question; and Selina wrote word to her friends that the first step in the troublesome business had been accomplished.

CHAPTER VII.

"I'D BETTER BRING IT ARTER DARK."

WHEN Kit Masters brought home his runaway wife from the Putney poorhouse, and learnt, through the rough lips of the butcher's wife, of the prospect that lay before her, surprise at the unexpected intelligence overpowered for a time all other considerations. Not that the news afforded him any pleasure. Like most mean and cruel natures, he *hated* animals and children, and, strange to say, in

taking a wife, it had never entered his head to seriously contemplate the probability of her bringing him a family. Bonnie had thought of it sometimes—in the sweet wondering way young married women will—as a misty dream, floating somewhere in the future, but never coming near enough to be realised. She was slower of comprehension than most other girls, and had even never asked herself whether the fading of the intangible vision would prove a disappointment or a comfort. But she had sense enough to understand all that Mrs. Bell's warning contained for her in the future, and as the grand new idea sunk down into her breast, and became established there, it blossomed into a source of the deepest happiness. But Mr. Masters viewed the matter in a very different light. It was a hindrance that tied his hands and forced him to curb his temper, and he sulked with it in consequence. Brute as he was, he felt that he dared not give Bonnie a blow, now that the fact of her maternity was patent to the neighbourhood. The wives of his acquaintance would have risen up in a body and "lynched" him had he laid a hand on her. So he was compelled to take refuge in bad temper, and he growled and scowled at the poor child, day after day, until nothing but the prospect of what was coming to solace her, could have kept her spirit

from breaking altogether. Her women friends were very kind to her at this juncture, and their sympathy helped to cheer and sustain her. All true mothers feel an interest in a girl's first trial, and Bonnie was so simple and childlike, that they wondered amongst themselves how she would ever go through it all, or be fit guardian for the little one when it had struggled into the world. But the instinct of maternity is great, and it came to Bonnie's assistance now. The same consciousness of dignity that invests even a poor little animal surrounded by its young, descended on her youthful head like a glory, and raised her to a level with her fellows. Her shiftless fingers, which had so often called forth a rebuke for laziness from her old grandmother, learned to sew and fell quickly enough when their aid was needed to manufacture little garments in which to envelope the coming babe. She no longer seemed to heed Kit's sharp rejoinders for unintentional offences; even his cruel taunts on her slow gait and loss of comeliness lost their power to provoke her. If she sighed one moment, she smiled the next, as in anticipation she felt the promised child's arms about her neck, and its kisses pressed upon her cheek. That any accident could happen to rob her of the coming blessing, never by any *calculation* entered Bonnie's head. Mrs. Bull had a

baby every year, and so had Mrs. Martin, and several others in the street; and all their babies grew fat and strong, and big, and kicked their chubby legs out at Bonnie as she passed, and made her think, with quickened breath, of the day when she should carry her own darling in her arms. So the spring and summer months dragged themselves away, and the young mother's step grew more lingering and slow, and her face became drawn and thin, and the neighbours spoke of her time of trial as being very near. Kit Masters didn't like the state of things at all. The hollow truce he was forced to maintain with his wife had the worst possible effect upon his nature, and every time she annoyed him he swore inwardly that he'd pay her double as soon as the affair was over. A dozen times a day too he would give vent to his hope that "the brat would be dead before it ever saw the light," and that this would be the first and last time Bonnie would ever make such a fool of him. He hadn't married a wife, he maintained, to have her cobbling at children's smocks half the day, and be laid up for the other half, and if she couldn't bestir herself to look after his comfort, why he must get someone who would, and that was the long and short of it. Bonnie had a violent fit of weeping over some speech of the sort the very day that her

little boy came into the world. Kit had been scolding her all the morning, until he made her so ill that he frightened himself, and ran off in haste to procure the attendance of Mrs. Bull. But when, after several hours of sharp suffering, Bonnie heard her baby cry, she thought she was rewarded for every pain this world had afforded her. From that moment her mind appeared lost to all outward things except the little creature that lay in her arms. She never asked for Kit; and though, at the invitation of Mrs. Bull, he did once enter the sick chamber and look down with a species of grunt at the young mother and her child, Bonnie never raised her eyes to his during the interview, but cuddled her little one closely to her breast, as though she feared that the glance of its father's evil eye might blight and wither it, as it had blighted all the happiness of her own heart.

It was at this period that Mrs. Bull made the round of the neighbours' houses in the little street in Drury Lane, giving it out as her opinion that Kit Masters was just the "most unnateral ill-feelin' creature" she had ever met with.

"D'ye think he's took that poor babby in 'is arms, or even so much as noticed it, Mrs. Martin," she said to the sympathising cobbler's wife. "Not 'e—the brute! 'E'd never 'ave entered the room if

I hadn't kind of shoved 'im in. And then 'e 'adn't a word to say to the poor dear—not of thanks, nor nuffin. And 'e does nought but worrit 'er. If that poor innercent hopens 'is mouth even, 'e's down upon 'em both and screamin' to 'er to shet 'im up; and 'e grumbles at 'er bein' hupstairs and not fit to work, as if a gal could be down and about when her babby's not four days old. Lor'! Mrs. Martin, ma'am, I'm sure I offen cussed Bull in my 'art at sich times, and I dessay you've done the same by your'n, but I'll never do it agen, not if I lives to make up my baker's dozen. But Bonnie don't seem to take no notice of 'is goin's on, that's one comfort! She lies there all day, smilin' at the young 'un, and talkin' and cooin' to it, while 'e's a-swearin' and cussin' down below, and a wishin' they was both underground, till 'twould make your blood cuddle in your veins to listen to 'im."

"I wonder it don't kill the pore gal!" ejaculated Mrs. Martin, who had had her share of connubial cuffing and abuse.

"Bless you! she don't seem even to hear it! She's as wrapt up in her boy as a cat over her kitten."

"Bonnie was always a bit soft," remarked the cobbler's wife. "I doubt whether she'll make a good mother."

"Let 'er alone! she'll do well enuff, I warrant."

There ain't too much love in this world, Mrs. Martin, and it's no use blamin' them as can feel it. But I pities the poor child when 'e gets old enuff for a whippin.'"

And meanwhile, Bonnie, ignorant and fearless of danger, lay in her bed and cooed to her new-found son.

* * * * *

On the day and at the hour appointed, Selina Farthingale found her way to the tripe shop at the corner of Bull Court, and met Mr. Joseph Mason and his friend. She did not like the air of mystery and mutual understanding with which the blowsy mistress of the tripe-shop ushered her into the greasy back parlour, nor the looks of the "cute" gentleman (no less an one than Mr. Kit Masters) to whom Mr. Mason introduced her; but she remembered for her comfort that she was effectually disguised, and that if the interview resulted in nothing she would not be compromised. So she tried to make herself as affable as possible under the circumstances. The whole of the concocted story which she had told Mr. Mason had to be gone through again for the benefit of Mr. Masters, who listened to it with one eye closed and a huge stick thrust into his mouth.

"One hundred pounds!" he repeated, as his

friend had done before him. "And you're authorised to pay that theer sum down on the nail, mum, if so be you can get what you want?"

"Just so! The money is at home, safe enough, and when the infant is handed over I shall pay it down in cash."

Kit Masters drew a long breath of relief.

"I knows the kid as will suit to a T," he said, slapping his thighs with his hand.

"Do you really? Is it a boy? How old is it? Has it blue eyes and a fair skin?"

"It's heverythink as you could desire, mum, and 'ealthy as can be—screams like a two-year-old: I ought to know for it lives close anigh my 'ouse."

"And do you think the parents can be persuaded to part with it? It must be for ever, remember!"

"I knows the father, and I fancy 'e'll listen to reason fast enuff. But if I brings you the child mum—say to-morrer arternoon, to this ere place—will you guarantee to have the shiners with you, and make a fair exchange?"

"Certainly I will! I shall not expect to have the child unless I do! But—but—will it make a great noise, do you think? Will it be much noticed as I carry it through the street?"

Kit Masters laughed hoarsely.

"I'll take care it shan't trouble you, mum. It

shall have a drop of summat to quiet it afore it comes 'ere."

"Oh! mind you don't hurt it!"

"Never you fear! The youngster as I've got my heye on won't kick for a drop of gin, I'll warrant that! But I'd better bring it arter dusk. What do you say, mum, to eight o'clock sharp to-morrer evening in this werry place?"

"I will be sure to be here," replied Selina, who, now that she had really accomplished her purpose, felt very nervous about the issue.

"Twenty-five of them shiners is for me, Kit," observed Joe Mason confidentially, as the two men shuffled out of her presence.

"Well, I s'pose they must be as that was our bargain; though it's a deal too much for your share of the job."

"You'd never 'ave 'eard of it if it 'adn't been for me," observed Mr. Mason, aggrievedly.

"True for you, old feller, and you managed the other business neat enuff, and so we'll say no more about this one. A hunderd pounds! Fancy that! Blest if I ever thought a family was sich a paying consarn before!"

Selina telegraphed at once to her friend Mrs. General Chasemore, who was lurking about Dover, to come up to London, and the next afternoon they

met in the now-deserted park. But Mrs. Chasemore refused to accompany the younger lady to Bull Court.

"I'll meet you in the Charing Cross waiting-room or anywhere you like, my dear, but the less we are seen together the better for both of us. Now! don't be nervous, Selina. All you have to do is to carry a good-sized shawl with you, and wrap the child well in it. An infant of a few days old makes a very small bundle after all, and no one will notice you if you just walk quietly through the street."

"And as soon as I reach you, you will take it off my hands?"

"Completely! I have had babies of my own, remember, and know how to manage them. I have already told my landlady that I have been called away to the lying-in bed of a daughter who is in extreme peril. When I return with an infant in my arms and say the poor mother's dead, she'll only think I have naturally taken charge of my own grandchild. Trust me, my dear, for making my story good."

"And shall you leave England to-morrow?"

"Yes! by the first boat. If any one questions me I shall maintain the same story as I have told the landlady; but unless specially unlucky I am not likely to meet any one I know. From Calais I shall travel at once to Normandy, where I have left Re-

gina at a very out-of-the-way place to wait my return."

"And then?"

"Then comes the most difficult part, my dear, but I have no fear of failure. I shall smuggle the infant amongst my wraps into the inn bedroom, and there keep it quiet——"

"But how?"

"(Oh! there are ways and means, trust me!) until the middle of the night, when it may yell if it likes. The rough people of the inn are not likely to wake. If they do and come to the door, I shall say madam is very ill and I cannot leave her to admit them. The next morning I shall announce that she has had a child. If they propose medical aid or assistance, I shall say I intend to nurse her myself. I have everything ready and prepared to deceive them, my dear. There is not a link in the chain missing, and they have been already informed that such an event is expected, and that I am in great fear lest it should happen prematurely."

"Shall you stay there long?"

"Only for a fortnight or so, and then move on to the South of France where we can procure a nurse for the infant and tell what story we like. I have gone over the business again and again and cannot see any chance of failure. The most important

thing is to keep Lady William in ignorance of the event till the infant is some weeks old, and I have arranged for that also."

"How will you manage it? She will be so awfully offended if she does not get the very first intelligence."

"I shall write after a few weeks and give her all the details, and say that Regina was wandering for the first fortnight and quite unable to tell me her mother's address, and my head was so completely addled with fear and anxiety that I couldn't think of any plan by which to procure it. At the same time we shall have the infant baptised and the birth announced in all the papers, so that the news may reach Mr. Vivian, for his wife has no idea of his address."

"Papa may have! He is Mr. Chasemore's solicitor, you know, but I have not heard him mention it."

"Well, my dear! it will be time enough to ask when we require it. As soon as I reach Regina again, I shall telegraph to you to put off your visit without assigning a reason. This will raise curiosity, and pave the way for what will follow. Then when we reach the South of France, you will join us as arranged."

"I understand perfectly. And now, as it is close

upon the time of appointment, I had better go and fetch this important baby. What do I look like Mrs. Chasemore? Would any one recognise me?"

"I'd defy them to do it! Your grey wig and spectacles give you the appearance of a woman of sixty. I should say you were a respectable head-nurse if I were asked. And your veil is so thick it completely hides your features. Have you got the notes?"

"Safe in my purse. Shall we go together as far as the Charing Cross station?"

"Yes! there will be no harm in that! But take care these men don't follow you or set some one to do so. If you have any suspicion of it, come straight to the waiting-room and tell me, and we'll shape our course accordingly."

"I fancy they are honest in their way," said Selina, "and would scarcely like, any more than ourselves, to be mixed up publicly in such a transaction."

"Very good! but you cannot be too cautious. They might have a dozen reasons for not wishing to lose sight of you. But if they watch you to the station and I take the child, it will be easy enough for you to make such changes in the waiting-room as shall prevent their recognising you as you go out again."

"I have provided for that," replied Selina, as she held up a hand-bag, containing a few necessities to alter her appearance.

Kit Masters and Joe Mason were punctual to their appointment, and as Selina entered the back parlour of the tripe shop, the former rose to his feet and opened a bundle which he carried in his arms. Miss Farthingale was no judge of new-born babies, but as she examined the little creature breathing peacefully beneath the flaring gaslight she could not help seeing that it was a healthy-looking pinky thing, with two red fists doubled up in its mouth and a head covered with a species of fluffy tow.

"Theer 'e is, mum, as fine a babby as you'd see on a summer's day, honly four days' hold—straight-limbed, good lungs, quiet sleeper, and with a monstrous happetite. I warrant 'e'll turn out a credit to any party as takes keer on 'im and gives 'im plenty to heat."

Mr. Masters spoke as if the baby were a dog or any other animal for sale, and, to do him justice, his own education and breeding had not been such as to enable him to regard it in any higher light.

"I see—a very nice little baby. Here is the money, and I'd better take him before he wakes up and cries," said Selina nervously.

"Don't you be afraid, mum," replied Kit Masters, "'e's safe for the next two hours. I give 'im a drop of daffy to soothe 'im off afore I came."

He carried the roll of bank-notes to the gaslight, and counted them deliberately.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, height, nine, ten—ten ten's a hundred! Thanky, mum, it's hall right and the bargain's complete."

He placed the sleeping infant in her arms as he spoke, and with a rough jerk to his cap, in which act of courtesy he was followed by his friend, slunk out of the room as if well ashamed of himself, as indeed he had need to be.

Selina wrapped the plaid shawl she had carried over her arm, all round the rather dirty bundle which she had just covenanted for, and, with a palpitating heart, passed out into the open air. But she need not have been alarmed. The tripe shop was full of customers, and no one even looked up at her as she brushed by them, nor noticed what she was carrying. She glanced right and left as she gained the pavement, but could see nothing of the men who had just left her, and so she hailed the first cab that she met, and jumping in was driven to the Charing Cross station. There, in the *waiting-room*, was Mrs. General Chasemore, but *they met without any bustle as they had agreed upon.*

"All right?" whispered Mrs. Chasemore, as they sat down side by side in a remote corner of the large room.

"Quite right! Here it is! Take it. I want to go into the dressing-room before any one notices me."

She placed the child on her friend's lap, and passed at once into the inner apartment. None of the passengers had had time to look at her, and, when she emerged again, she was completely altered. The grey wig, spectacles, and veil, were in her hand-bag. Several artificial roses had been hastily pinned in her bonnet, a crimson tie was knotted round her throat, and she was Selina Farthingale again. Leaving the station thus attired and without the child, it would have been a clever scout who would have known her for the elderly woman who had completed the bargain in the tripe shop.

"You'd better keep these," she whispered, putting her bag into Mrs. General Chasemore's hand. "They may be useful to you while crossing to-morrow."

"You sharp girl! So they will! But I must go back to my lodgings now and see if I can get some assistance for the night with this little wretch. I shall be worn out else."

"Will it be safe?"

"Quite so! The landlady only knows me as Mrs. Jackson, and this will be my grandchild—my poor dear daughter's last gift to me. I forgot to get an onion though for the weeping business. Do I look altogether too jolly for a bereaved mother?"

"You don't look a bit like yourself," rejoined Selina, and indeed it was true, for Mrs. General Chasemore had also smoothed down her curling front of golden hair and rubbed the rouge off her cheeks and otherwise tried to make herself look as respectable as she could, which, when done, was not much.

The confederates then parted, and Selina Farthingale, with a much lightened heart, returned in her own character to her father's house.

* * * * *

On that very afternoon, about five o'clock, Mrs. Bull had stepped over to Masters' to see how her patient was getting on, and if she were ready for her tea. She found Bonnie very happy and comfortable, lying in bed with her little boy, but apparently not much disposed to partake of her usual meal.

"This will never do," cried Mrs. Bull authoritatively. "You should be gettin' up a fine happetite now, Bonnie, and 'ow do you think that theer boy's a-goin' to thrive if you don't relish your vittels."

Come now, let me raise you a bit, and jest you eat your bread and butter and drink your tea. I can't leave you for the night till you've taken nourishment."

"But I'm so sleepy," replied Bonnie with half closed, heavy lidded eyes, but a smile of contentment over her face the while that seemed to say she cared for nothing but to lie there and be happy. "I don't know how it is, but I feel as if I couldn't raise my head for ever so. And baby seems amost as bad."

"What have you bin a havin' since I was here, then?" demanded her friend suspiciously.

"Nothin' but a drink of milk. Kit came home about an hour ago and give it me. And a drop of the medicine the doctor left for me. He said I'd better take it."

"Then I wish as Kit would be a mindin' of 'is own business, for theer was no call for you to take more of that stuff, and if physic ain't wanted it's worse than none. Don't you be persuaded to drink any more on it. I'll tell you if it's necessary."

"No, I won't drink any more," said Bonnie in a drowsy tone.

"Ow's the youngster gettin' on?"

The girl roused herself a little at this question.

"Oh, beautiful! Just see how his hair's a-grow-

ing—quite yaller like mine! And I've found sich a funny little thing on his ear! Look, now! Jest like a pea, ain't it?" and she turned the child round, and showed the mark, as she spoke.

"So it be," acquiesced Mrs. Bull. "That's curous, too, for I mind Mrs. Martin's youngest but one havin' jist sich another, only her'n was red colour, and this is white. That's what we call a 'pig's ear' down our part of the country, Bonnie. 'E'll be a glutton, that boy of yourn, as sure as 'e lives!"

"He's a little glutton aready," said the proud young mother, as she folded him to her breast. "But it's more than I feels to-night, Mrs. Bull. I couldn't touch that tea for ever so. It quite makes me sick to look at it!"

"Well, I'm disappointed, that's what I am! and you gettin' on so nicely, too! I think we must give you a little more hair to-morrer, Bonnie. This room's unkimmon close, and has a queer physicky smell about it. I can't stay with you longer now 'cause Bull's waiting for his tea; but Masters will be in afore long, and if you can relish summat afore you goes to sleep for the night, 'e must get it for you."

"All right!" said Bonnie inarticulately, as her *friend* rose to leave the room.

"Well, they're main sleepy, the pair on 'em,"

thought Mrs. Bull, as she returned to her lord and master. "However, 'tis as good as food for 'em, any day."

She heard no more of Bonnie or her goings-on that evening, and concluded all was right with her little neighbour. But as she and Bull, after a hard day's work of selling and buying and cleaning up, were about to retire to their well-earned rest, they were startled by hearing a long piercing scream proceed from a house close by. Drunken cries and brawls were very common, as has been said before, in that dirty little street; but there was something in the tone of this that arrested Mrs. Bull's hand on its way with a hair-brush to the back of her head.

"Bull!" she exclaimed, "whatever is that?"

"Dunno, I'm sure, Hann. Public'ouse bein' turned out, maybe."

"No, that ain't a drinkin' voice—its fear. Throw me over my gownd agen, Bull, for, as sure as my name's Hann, that scream came from Bonnie."

"From Masters' gal? Don't you be foolish, now! You're never a-goin' out agen at this time o' night?"

"But I ham. Theer's summat wrong over theer, I'm sure on it; and I can't rest till I go and see. Come with me, Bull, for the love of God!"

The woman was so excited that her husband

caught the infection of her fear, and ran across the street with her to Kit Masters' house. But the first person they encountered was that gentleman himself, standing serenely on the threshold of his domain.

"Whatever is the matter with Bonnie, Masters?" exclaimed Mrs. Bull, breathlessly. "I 'eerd her voice right over to our 'ouse. What have you bin a-doin' to 'er?"

"I ain't done nothin'," returned the man sullenly; "but she's took with one of 'er fits of boltin' agen, and gone down the street like a madwoman."

"Gone down the street!" cried Mrs. Bull, "and at this time o' night! Mercy on us! What had she on?"

"Precious little, I fancy, except a cloak. She flew out of the 'ouse afore I could catch 'er."

"She must be out of 'er mind haltogether. And to leave the poor babe, too! "Where is it?"

"Oh, *that* ain't heer."

"Ain't heer! The babby gone? Why, who's took it? Masters, you've 'ad a 'and in all this, I can see, and you'd better make a clean breast of it, if you don't wants to have the perlice set arter you."

"The perlice! What are you allays stuffin' the perlice down my throat for? Can't a man do what 'e likes with 'is own? If you wants to know the

truth, here it is. I can't stand the noise and the bother of a brat a-squealing in my ears night and day, and so I've put the youngster out to nuss; and Bonnie she chose to take on about it and cheek me, and then she bolted down the street afore I could stop 'er."

"And right, too, if you've robbed 'er of 'er babby. What call 'ad you to take a four-days' old creeture out of its mother's breast to turn it over to strangers? Ugh! you unnatural beast! And maybe you've killed 'em both, for it's my belief Bonnie will never get over sich a trubble."

"Can't 'elp it, if she don't. She's gone a nice way to kill 'erself now; but she allays was a fool!"

"And ain't you a-goin' arter 'er?"

"Wheer's the good? I suppose when she's tired of runnin' she'll come 'ome agen."

"If she ain't brought 'ome on a stretcher—though much you'd keer if she was! Wheer's the child now?"

"Ah, don't you wish I may tell yer! so that she might go a-botherin' arter it every day, instead of attendin' to 'er dooties. It's safe enough, and it's well took keer on; and that's all she'll know of it until I choose to tell 'er."

"And you a-goin' to leave that poor gal cuttin' about the streets all night with her 'ead a-fire, while

you sits at 'ome, I s'pose. Come on, Bull! it makes me sick to look at 'im. We've 'ad our quarrels, but you've never bin as bad as that, old man. That poor sick creeture 'll die now, as sure as sure; and all I 'opes is that her death may be brought 'ome murder to that man's door!"

But Mrs. Bull's wish was never gratified. Nor did the inhabitants of the little street in Drury Lane ever set eyes on poor shiftless Bonnie again. From the night on which she awoke, half stupefied with the opiate her husband had administered to her, to find that he had robbed her of her child, Kit Masters never was troubled with the sight of his poor wife. A few inquiries were set on foot by the neighbours, but they brought forth no fruit; and the general opinion amongst the women was that Masters had made away with both Bonnie and her baby, and buried their bodies beneath his floor. Consequently he was very generally shunned, although this behaviour had little effect upon him beside making him let his shop, and go and live with his father and mother at Richmond.

And for a long while faithful Mrs. Bull would watch and wait for the reappearance of the girl she had loved to succour; but Bonnie's violet eyes and sweet, dreamy face were never seen in the little street in Drury Lane again.

CHAPTER VIII.

"AND NOW WHERE IS MY BOY?"

WHEN Vivian Chasemore made up his mind so suddenly to accompany his friend Lord Charlesford to Norway, he left an address, to which to forward his letters, with his solicitor. Not that he had any notion that his wife would write to him, or any wish to hear from her. The cruel words which she had spoken relative to having married him for his money had sunk so deep into his heart, that he believed no after-conduct on her part could ever have the power to erase them. Any truce that might take place between them hereafter must be a false and hollow peace, maintained for the benefit of society, and which could bring no comfort to his wounded spirit. So he felt little anxiety to communicate with her, and only longed to put the greatest distance possible between himself and home, and to try and forget all that was going on there.

Lord Charlesford preferred yachting along the coasts of Finland and Norway, and living (when he did go ashore) amongst the peasantry of the country; and Vivian was quite ready to second his friend's wishes and avoid the paths of civilisation altogether. Consequently, after the first visit paid to the post-

town where he had ordered his letters and papers to be sent, he did not see it again, but followed his friend's fortunes wheresoever the bonnie yacht *Thisbe* took them, and lived for several months of summer weather a pleasant sort of gipsy life, half aboard and half ashore, diversifying his taste of salt water with inland fishing and shooting, and with studying the manners and customs of a much unknown and very interesting people.

Everard Selwyn was perfectly happy, or he would have been so, had he not guessed that Vivian Chase-more was suffering mental tortures even while he laughed and talked as loudly as his fellows, and scorned the notion of fatigue or ennui. Lord Charlesford was a generous, open-hearted young nobleman, with plenty of English pluck and energy, and plenty of money to back it; so that had it not been for the worm of disappointment gnawing secretly at poor Vivian's heart, there could hardly have been found a merrier or more united trio of voyagers in the wide world.

Dr. Morton's croaking prophecies of the dilapidated condition of Vivian's lungs proved utterly fallacious. They had endured a severe attack of inflammation, and been rather tender for a few weeks afterwards; but the young man was strong and vigorous, with a good hardy British constitution, and

could have stood the assault of many more such attacks with impunity. The unworthy fear of future penury which had induced Regina to carry out her wicked plot for deceiving her husband and defrauding Sir Arthur of his rights, had no cause for springing from Vivian's present state of health, for he became stronger than he had ever been in the bracing air of Norway and from the effects of his sea voyage.

He grew so brown and healthy-looking that Selwyn was almost tempted sometimes to believe that the agonised expressions of despair, which he had been called upon to listen to during his friend's illness, had been the offspring of a fevered imagination, rather than the utterances of conviction. But now and again the knitted brow, closed teeth, and look of pain that would pass over Vivian's countenance, even in their gayest moments, told him that the spirit still suffered, whatever the body was determined to conceal.

Things had been going on in this manner for about six months, when the fast-increasing cold of autumn warned Lord Charlesford that the season for yachting was over, and they had better fix upon some resting-place for the winter months. He had two plans in his head. Should they lay up the *Thisbe* for the winter months in harbour at Norway,

and spend their time between Christiana and Stockholm; or run south to Paris and Berlin—or should they return to England at once and make another voyage out with the next spring? Vivian voted for remaining where they were. What was the good of England, he averred, in the winter season, when the country was a mixture of mud and snow, and London completely empty? If the Norwegian and Swedish capitals did not afford them sufficient amusement, they could easily, as Charlesford had suggested, run over to Paris for awhile and return when they had had enough of it. But whatever they did let them remain out of England. He urged Selwyn to back his choice. But the young actor was his guest and did not choose to take advantage of the fact. He remained neutral, and Vivian had to do a double share of argument on his own account.

Lord Charlesford was quite willing to accede to his request (though he *did* remark that his old mother would be very much cut up if he missed spending Christmas at home), so it was finally arranged that their first halting-place should be Christiana, whereupon the head of the *Thisbe* was turned in that direction, and within a few days they found *themselves* there. This was the post-town to which *the young men* had directed their letters and papers

to be sent, and there was quite an assortment of news brought them to their hotel the same evening. Vivian tossed over his letters carelessly. They all seemed more or less official: at all events the one handwriting that held any interest for him was not amongst them. Not that he had expected to see it. Regina's pride, he felt convinced, would never permit her to make the *amende honorable* to him, and even were she to do so, what would be the use of it? No contrition for the past nor promises for the future could undo what she had done, which was to reveal her true heart to him. He cast the letters to one side in a heap and took up the *Times* instead, beginning with the last news sent out instead of the first. What made him cast his eye over the list of births he never knew. It was not his habit, any more than that of other men, to feel any interest in the "Ladies' column," but as he folded the sheet his own name in capitals caught his sight and arrested his attention. It is wonderful how soon we can pick out a name familiar to us from amongst dozens of strangers, and his was an uncommon one. At first he wondered who could bear the same cognomen; then, as he read the paragraph more attentively, he perceived to his astonishment that it was really himself, and no one else, who was mentioned therein.

"On the second of September, at the Hotel

Vache, Pays-la-reine, Normandy, the wife of Vivian Chasemore, Esq., of 3, Premier Street, Portland Place, of a son, prematurely."

"Good God!" exclaimed Vivian aloud, as the foregoing announcement made itself apparent to his senses; "it must be a hoax."

"What's a hoax, old fellow," said Lord Charlesford; "nothing wrong, I hope!"

"No! I suppose not! but there's something here about—about my wife!"

"*Your wife!*" echoed his friends simultaneously. Knowing Mrs. Vivian Chasemore as they thought they did, and that the married couple were not on the most affectionate terms, both their minds had at once leapt to the fear of a scandal.

"What is it, Vivian? Do speak," said Selwyn anxiously. "She's not dead, is she? What are you staring at that column for?"

"Oh! no! it's nothing to make a fuss about—but—but—she's got a baby!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Lord Charlesford, "is that all? and didn't you expect it, old boy? What a lark! This comes of married men running off on yachting expeditions and leaving no address behind them.—I hope it's the right sort, eh?"

"Yes!—a son—at least the paper says so. I say, Selwyn, this seems very queer to me."

"I daresay it does, old boy, but we've been knocking about so long, you know; there was no means of getting at the news before! Look at your letters, Vivian! There is sure to be something about it there."

Vivian turned quickly to his pile of correspondence, and examined it until he came to an envelope in a feminine handwriting with a foreign postmark. He frowned as he caught sight of it. "Surely I have seen that hand before," he thought. And the contents confirmed his suspicion.

"Hyères, September 30th.

"MY DEAR VIVIAN,

"I suppose, after the last interview we had together, that you will not be very much pleased to hear from me, but as there is no one else to write to you, and it is important you should learn what has taken place, I am compelled to run the risk of incurring your displeasure. I happened to be staying at an out-of-the-way little town in Normandy, about three weeks ago, called Pays-la-reine, when the woman of the hotel requested my assistance for a lady who had been taken suddenly ill in the night. Fancy my astonishment when I found it was poor dear Regina! She had wandered over to Pays-la-reine in search of solitude with a lady friend, a Mrs.

Brownlow, who had been obliged to leave her the same day, and the disappointment, I suppose, upset her. However, all went well, and she is the mother of a fine little boy. I am sorry to tell you, however, that Regina was so feverish and light-headed afterwards that we were obliged to keep her very quiet, as we could procure no medical assistance. Indeed it was most fortunate I was there (notwithstanding your unkind prohibition, my dear Vivian), or I do not think your poor wife would have got over it. I nursed her carefully, and as soon as she was able to be moved, we came on to Hyères. I have written to Lady William to come to her daughter (as, *after what you said*, I do not suppose you would wish me to remain with her longer than is necessary), and when she does so I shall resign my charge. Regina begs me to tell you that the little boy has blue eyes and fair hair, and that she has had him baptised by the names of 'Vivian Peregrine,' as she believed they would have been your choice. As soon as her mother arrives she intends to return to Premier Street for the winter. She sends you her love, and will write as soon as she feels equal to the exertion. Believe me, my dear Vivian, to be your much maligned step-mother,

"CHARLOTTE CHASEMORE."

Under other circumstances, to hear that Mrs. General Chasemore was actually living in the same house as his wife, would have driven Vivian nearly wild, but he did not know what to say to this letter. It was impossible to upbraid or even not to thank the woman who had befriended Regina at such a moment, and when he reflected that she might have died without her assistance, he felt almost grateful to her. And yet how ardently he wished that any one but Mrs. General Chasemore had been in the Hotel Vache at that juncture. However, this little annoyance was soon swallowed up in the joy and surprise that followed his perusal of her letter. He had a son at last: an heir to inherit his grandfather's property.

The news had come so unexpectedly upon him that for a while it seemed impossible to realise; but as soon as he had had time to take it in, his delight knew no bounds. He talked no more of wintering in Stockholm or even Paris, but averred his intention of returning home at once. He did not wish to spoil his friends' pleasure, he said. Let them continue their route as first planned; but for his own part they must see that it was absolutely necessary he should return to England. His quarrel with Regina seemed forgotten. If he remembered it with a sudden sigh, the sad recollection was dispersed as

quickly as it rose by the thought of little lips ready to welcome him that would never tell him they loved him only for his money. To the young and inexperienced father or mother, it seems impossible that the infant they watch grow up beside them can ever turn round with words of ingratitude and rebellion to sting the heart that has given up all for their sakes. These little lips must love caresses; these little tongues must speak the truth; these little eyes can never bear any expression but that of affection and obedience. We believe our children to be too much our own. We forget that we are but the instruments of bringing into the world and nurturing a set of spirits that may prove to be utterly opposed to our own in strength of will and purpose. Whilst they are infants, and the childish spirits are subservient, we fancy we can mould them to what we wish; but, alas! the baby too often outstrips our own in growth, and what we believed to be a docile son or daughter, we find suddenly transformed into a rebellious man or woman.

Of course neither Charlesford nor Selwyn opposed the wishes of their friend. The former, still hankering after the old mother, who would be so disappointed if she didn't see his bonnie face smiling at her across the Christmas table, avowed *his intention* of returning home in the *Thisbe*, and

so the three men set sail together, and after rather a rough passage, reached Southampton in the month of November. Vivian would not stop for even a night on his way, but, bidding farewell to his friends, proceeded without delay to Premier Street, where, as he rightly judged, he should find Regina. Mrs. Vivian Chasemore, after remaining some weeks at Hyères, had taken the advice of her husband's step-mother, and returned in state to London, where the French *bonne*, who had accompanied them home, was dismissed, and an important-looking English nurse, at forty pounds a year, installed in the office of chief guardian to the young heir. Lady William Nettleship had not joined her daughter as Mrs. General Chasemore had requested her to do. She was ruffled in the first place at Regina having presumed, after all her own prognostications to the contrary, to have a baby; and indignant, in the second, that the event should have occurred with so little ceremony, and under the superintendence of "that creature, the general's widow." If the dowager Mrs. Chasemore had nursed Regina so judiciously thitherto, let her continue to do so. Lady William had no desire to share the honour with a woman of whose antecedents the world knew nothing; and as for her grandson, she doubted if he would be any the worse for keeping. Thus she

confided to her *camarade*, Mrs. Runnymede, who was quite ready to join in the abuse of a fellow creature whose chief crime in the eyes of society was precisely the same as her own. Lady William had called on Regina in Premier Street as soon as she heard that she was alone, and been introduced to the new addition to the family, magnificent in his robes of cambric and Valenciennes lace; but she had not repeated her visit, and Mrs. Vivian Chasemore was beginning to think it was rather dull work, staying at home and playing at "mamma," and wished that she had followed her own idea and gone to Nice or Mentone again for the winter. But the good sense of the advice which had been offered her, showed itself when her lady's-maid rushed into her dressing-room one morning to inform her that the master had just arrived from Southampton, and was coming upstairs. How her heart beat as she heard it! She tried to compose herself and appear calm as she lay on the sofa in her soft clinging robes of white merino, with a pale blue ribbon twined in her golden hair. But Vivian gave her little time for consideration. He ran straight to her dressing-room, and fell on his knees beside her couch. All the bitter past seemed wiped out for ever, as he realised that he had found her again, and she was the mother of his child.

"My darling!" he murmured, as he showered kisses upon her face, now flushed with excitement and fear. "Can you forgive me? Oh, Regina! when I think that I might have lost you during my absence, I cannot tell you how I regret my hasty conduct. But it was all from love of you, my dearest. It was the awful thought that you did not care for me that drove me wild. But it is not true, is it, Regina? You do love me a little now—if never before—that I am the father of your child?"

"I do love you!" she answered, with white, trembling lips.

"Thank you—thank you a thousand times! You have made my coming home a happiness indeed. What a surprise it was, Regina, when I saw the announcement in the *Times*. I couldn't believe my eyes. Why didn't you give me a hint before I left home? Do you think I would have gone had I known it?"

"You were so ill, Vivian—and I was not sure!"

"I was such a brute, you mean, my darling, that I had destroyed all confidence between us. I don't deserve to be so happy as I am to day. However, we won't say any more about it, will we? And now, where is my boy? I am all impatience to see the little fellow."

Regina rang the bell and desired the lady's-maid to tell the nurse to bring down the baby to see Mr. Chasemore.

"To see his papa, you mean!" exclaimed Vivian gaily. "I hope the poor little chap will never think of me as 'Mr. Chasemore.' Who is he most like, Regina—you or me?"

"I really don't know," she stammered. "He will be very fair, nurse thinks, but you must judge for yourself."

"And are you very, very fond of him, my darling?"

"Oh, Vivian! of course I am; but he is very small yet, you know—only ten weeks old."

"Ten weeks old! Surely you ought to be looking stronger than you do, Regina! You seem to me even paler and thinner than you were when we parted."

"I have been very ill," she said, colouring.

"Yes, I know you have; but what does Dr. Morton think of you now?"

"I have not seen him since my return."

"Not seen him! Why is that?"

"I am quite well. I do not require any medical advice."

"But I am not satisfied with your appearance, dearest. I had hoped this little event would make

"a great improvement in your health, but you are certainly looking very fragile. I shall send for Morton to-morrow, and see what he says about it."

"Oh, pray don't!" she exclaimed hurriedly. "I hate that man, and have not the slightest need of him. I shall get quite strong now you have come home."

"Bless you for saying that, dear!" he answered just as the nurse entered the room with her charge, and curtsied low to her new master.

"Is this the young gentleman, nurse?"

"Yes, sir! and I hope now you've come back, sir, that his poor mamma won't fret as much as she's been a-doin', for they're neither of them as thriving as I should like to see 'em."

Vivian took the infant in his arms, and carried it to the light.

"What a queer little mortal!" he remarked as he uncovered its face. "He is not very fat, is he?"

He was not; for the poor little baby that Kit Masters had delivered over to the care of Miss Selina Farthingale, had not thriven very well on its change of nurses. Doses of gin and opium, hurried journeys by night, and a sudden transfer from its mother's breast to a feeding bottle, had changed the current of life in the hapless infant's constitu-

tion, and given it what its nurse termed "a check." Consequently it had progressed but slowly, and at ten weeks old was much paler and older looking than it should have been.

"It is not what you may call a plump baby, sir," replied the nurse. "You see, his mamma not being able to nurse him, and his being brought up by hand is a great drawback. But we hope to see him fill out by-and-by and do credit to his bottle."

Vivian bent down and kissed the little puny face earnestly. Would this joyous new hope which had scarcely had time to settle itself into a certainty, prove a disappointment after all?

"He's not a bit like me, Regina, that's certain," he said, after a pause. "His eyes are very blue—quite a violet blue—and his hair is yellow like yours. And as for his nose, my dear!—I don't know who he's got that from. I'm afraid it's a decided pug."

"Babies' noses alter so much, don't they, nurse?" said Regina, languidly.

"Oh, yes, ma'am; of course they do. Most babies have the same sort of nose when they're so little. I dare say our young gentleman's there, will turn out just like his papa's by-and-by."

She received back the bundle of flannel and *long clothes* as she spoke.

"Come, my beauty! has it seen its own papa, then? It'll pick up twice as fast now you've come, sir. I've always said the dear child was a-pining for the sight of you. And he isn't the only one that has pined either," remarked the nurse, with the familiarity of her class, as she backed out of the room.

"Regina, my darling! is it true? Have you been pining for your husband till even the servants have remarked it?" exclaimed Vivian as the door closed and he took his wife in his arms.

Her heart was beating so violently, and she was so over-excited that she had no answer to give him, except that which was conveyed by a burst of tears. But it was enough for Vivian. He interpreted it according to his own desire, and resolved that it should wipe off henceforth and for ever the memory of all that had distressed him in the past. There was one matter on which he wished to speak to his wife—the very one which parted them; but he resolved that it should not be yet, but that he would give her time to settle down into the old life again before he broached any subject that was likely to create a difference between them.

"And so you have called him 'Vivian Peregrine,'" he said, alluding to the baby. "I like your choice, darling, because it proves you were thinking of me,"

but I should have preferred him to have my father's name of Edward instead of mine. However, that will do for number two," he added, laughing.

Regina did not laugh, as most mothers would have done at this very natural joke. She only smiled in a sickly manner, and turned a shade paler.

"How does your mother take it? Is she not very proud of her grandson?" continued Vivian.

"I don't think so. She has only been here once since my return, and then she took very little notice of him. She is quite absorbed in that woman, Mrs. Runnymede, and seems to care nothing for her own flesh and blood."

"Never mind, dear! We will love the little chap enough for all his family put together, will we not? Our *own child*! I can hardly believe it, even now that I have seen him. I had almost resigned myself to the belief that it would never be! Oh, Regina! my dear, dear wife, you have made me so exquisitely happy. With your love, and that dear little one, I feel as if I should never know what it is to feel miserable in this world again."

CHAPTER IX.

"YOU ARE THE MOST WONDERFUL WOMAN IN THE
WORLD."

THERE is one person, and by no means an unimportant one in the present history, whose fortunes appear to have been dropped or altogether lost sight of in the general struggle for the shower of gold. I allude to Miss Janet Oppenheim. But she has been by no means forgotten, although the uneventful years she has passed in the service of Miss Netherwood at Clarence Lodge, had afforded no materials as yet necessary to the elimination of this little plot. This fact was due almost entirely to the absence of Sir Arthur Chasemore from England. Miss Oppenheim had no friends, natural or otherwise. She was parentless, and the few connections remaining to her had made their home in India; she and an orphan grandson being the only relatives remaining to Mrs. Mathers, and the boy had died at sea some time before his grandmother. Consequently Janet Oppenheim had been thrown completely on her own resources when she accepted a temporary home with Mr. Farthingale and his daughter. She had been full of doubts and surmises with regard to the position in which her aunt had left her, but had gained

no certain proofs to go upon, when the sudden manner in which she was thrust forth from the lawyer's house, and cast upon the tender mercies of Miss Netherwood, completely confused her mind upon the subject. Was it possible, she thought, that if money were due to her, Mr. Farthingale would dare defraud her of her rights in so open a manner? She was perfectly aware of the reason she had been sent away, and the knowledge would have been a feather in her cap, had it not been so soon followed by the intelligence of Sir Arthur Chase-more's departure from England. That was a real blow to her. She had just begun to believe she had succeeded in awaking an interest in the baronet's mind, when he went away without even saying good-bye to her. She had intended to consult him on the subject of her own affairs, and see if he could find out anything concerning them; and now she had positively no one to whom she could turn. Miss Farthingale had taken care she should make no friends whilst staying with them (except that one friend, for whose sake she got so abrupt a dismissal), and so she felt that for the present, at all events, there was nothing to be done but to wait patiently, and make her way as well as she could at *Clarence Lodge*. She had written a letter to Mr. *Farthingale's* office, asking humbly for information

respecting her late aunt's affairs, and she had received in answer a shuffling statement to the effect that the lawyer was doing his utmost in her behalf, and that as soon as ever he had any satisfactory information to give her, she should hear from him. Miss Janet Oppenheim was wise in her generation. She saw she could do no good by moving in the matter without advice, and so she locked the lawyer's reply carefully away in her desk, and resolved to be patient and bide her time. Meanwhile she had contrived, in her soft, feline way, to wriggle into the confidence of Miss Netherwood, and make herself necessary to that lady's comfort. At the time we meet her again, she had been for three years at Clarence Lodge, and was the right hand of its mistress. From having commenced as a pupil-teacher, entrusted with only the youngest and most troublesome children in the school, she had risen to be Miss Netherwood's housekeeper and *major domo*—who did all the marketing, superintended the servants, and never entered the schoolroom except it was to carve the joints at the early dinners.

Miss Netherwood, who was almost as much alone in the world as Janet herself, used to declare to her friends that she hardly knew how she had conducted the school before she had the assistance of dear Miss Oppenheim, and she believed she

should resign it the very day she left her. Not that Miss Oppenheim was so unworldly wise as to let Miss Netherwood suspect that such a day would ever come to pass. That would have strained the links of the chain that bound them together. The elder lady never contemplated such a misfortune as losing her young friend, although from her belief in her honesty, sobriety, purity, and all the other cardinal virtues, she might have feared such a complete treasure would be snatched from her arms. But Miss Janet never gave her cause for such a suspicion. Her conduct was propriety itself, and Miss Netherwood did not believe that she ever thought of, far less designed, such an end as matrimony. The good lady had never caught sight of any of those foreign letters addressed to her *protégée* in a bold masculine hand, which commenced to arrive soon after Sir Arthur left home, and for which Janet used to call at the post-office during her daily rounds of duty. The baronet had rushed away from England, disgusted, as he believed, with all he left behind him; but after a while he had felt rather solitary, and thoughts of the melting looks and soft-purring tones of the girl, who had administered to his consolation by flattering his vanity in Miss Farthingale's drawing-room, crept back into his mind, and raised in it a desire to

communicate with her. A note which she had sent to tell him of her abrupt departure, had informed him also of her present address, and there he had sent his first epistle from Algiers, which he had not intended to be the commencement of a correspondence. But Janet had answered it so artfully, that she had drawn him on to send another letter, and yet another, until a system of communication was regularly set up and the post-office fixed upon for an address, lest the number of epistles Miss Oppenheim received should attract attention. It is almost easier to become intimate friends through writing letters than by personal communication. One can say so much more on paper than one can by word of mouth; besides, time and opportunity and privacy all contribute to favour a confidence which might never have bloomed without their aid. Any way, if the baronet did not fall in love with Janet Oppenheim, by reason of the chatty letters which she continued for the space of two years to send him, he became very friendly and intimate with her, and looked forward with interest to meeting her again. When he returned to England, he found more difficulty in seeing her than he had anticipated, for the rules at Clarence Lodge were very strict: but the uncertainty and secrecy of their interviews made them all the more delightful, and the man who had

considered it a nuisance and a trouble to be obliged to attend a dinner-party or a ball, might often be seen pacing up and down some selected spot in St. John's Wood for hours, waiting until the requirements of Miss Netherwood permitted Janet Oppenheim to leave the house and join him.

Not that he was enamoured of her even yet, or, at least, admitted the fact to himself. He believed he had made up his mind never to marry, and only regarded the little teacher in the light of a dear friend and confidante. And Janet, clever as deep, played her cards into his hand, believing that "all things come to him who knows how to wait."

You may be sure that every detail of the Vivian Chasemores' married life, so far as they were known to the public, were discussed at length between these two; and that Regina's coldness and Vivian's illness and departure to Norway, and the unexpected advent of the heir, were all severally talked about and commented upon.

"You bear it so well," said Janet, pathetically, alluding to the birth of the baby, as they walked together one evening when she was supposed to be at church. "I cannot think how you can speak so quietly about it. But then you were always so generous with regard to those people."

"Well, it's not their fault, you see," replied Sir

Arthur, with a comical air, "and only what was to be expected after all."

"Not a bit of it! No one had the least idea of such a thing. And they were so very close about it, too. I have heard through a friend of Miss Netherwood, who knows that wretch Selina Farthingale, that even Mrs. Chasemore's mother had hardly a hint given her of such an event, until it had actually occurred."

"Yes! that was queer, wasn't it. And Vivian himself told me that when he read the birth in the *Times* he thought it must be a hoax."

"What an extraordinary idea! One would have thought after all her disappointment, and considering how much depended on it, that she would have been too proud to make such a mystery of the affair. Where was this important baby born?"

"I really don't know. At some out-of-the-way place in Normandy, I believe. No one seems to be sure. Even Vivian is misty on the subject."

"Stranger still! Who was with her at the time?"

"I never asked, my dear. She left England very suddenly, and came back in the same way—plus the son and heir. It was altogether very funny, but it's no business of mine."

"I think it *is* your business, Sir Arthur. Does it not strike you as very unusual, that a young mother

about to lay-in of her first child should run away from her own home and friends to be confined in some remote district abroad, without the attendance of a medical man or nurse."

"Oh, I believe old Mrs. Chasemore (the general's widow, you know) was staying with her at the time, and Vivian was very much annoyed that it should have been so."

"Mrs. General Chasemore! She seems to be a nice character for a reference, if all you have told me concerning her is true."

"You are very mysterious this evening, my dear Janet. What are you driving at?"

"Never mind. If I told you, you would call me a fool. But I can put two and two together as well as anyone."

"I know you can! That is why I want to know your little game."

"Sir Arthur! has it ever struck you that that child may not belong to Mrs. Vivian Chasemore at all?"

"Good heavens! No! Whose should it be?"

"Oh, you men! what stupid geese you are! It is as easy to gull you as possible. Why should it *not* belong to somebody else?"

"Why should it? What object would there be in *passing off* another person's child as their own?"

Janet Oppenheim stopped short and stared the baronet in the face.

"Are you quite blind," she said, "or only pretending to be so? Why, she'd do it for the money, of course. I don't say that *he* knows anything about it."

"For the money? For an heir! I see. But it is not possible, Janet. She could never be so foolish. It would be found out at once."

"It *will* be found out if it is the case, for I am determined to rest neither night nor day, till I know the truth. For *your* sake!" she added, with a gentle squeeze of the baronet's arm.

Sir Arthur could not recover the shock of the suspicion she had presented to him.

"Not her child!" he kept on repeating. "Whatever put such an idea into your head, Janet?"

"Everything! Just put the facts together for your own consideration, and see how suspicious they look. Your cousin left England in May, and the baby was born in September. Why had he no idea of his wife's condition when he parted with her? Then she leaves her home, still without a word to her mother or any one, and without writing to tell her husband. She remains abroad no one is sure where, with that disreputable old woman, Mrs. Chasemore, and then it is suddenly announced that she has had a baby,

and she returns to Premier Street, in pomp, with an infant and nurse in her train. It is all too unnatural not to excite inquiry."

"Why should it *not* be her own child?" repeated Sir Arthur.

"Why *should* it be?" retorted Janet Oppenheim. "She had every opportunity to palm off the child of some one else, and every inducement to make her do so. Besides——"

"Besides—what? Don't keep anything back from me, Janet. I am sure you have some other foundation for thinking as you do beyond the mere suspicious circumstances you have mentioned."

"Well, I didn't mean to tell you just yet, as I said before, but I don't know why you shouldn't hear it. I *have* more reason than you think, for talking as I do. What was the name you told me that Mr. Vivian Chasemore adopted whilst on the stage?"

"Alfred Waverley."

"I thought as much. Well, Sir Arthur, it's very strange, but we have a woman in our house who knew him under that name."

"Really! Who is it?"

"A servant! I'll tell you how I came across her. I have the engaging of all Miss Netherwood's servants, and last month we were in want of what we

call a schoolroom-maid; that is a person to wait on the young ladies and keep their rooms clean. I went to office after office, but could find no one likely to suit. At last the mistress of one place told me that if I would take a girl who had never been out in service before, she had a very respectable young woman of the name of Belton, who wanted a situation. I saw Belton, and found her to be a pretty girl, but looking very sad and sickly. She was so gentle and quiet, however, that I took a fancy to her; and as I found she could come for very small wages (Miss Netherwood is awfully stingy, you know) I engaged her for the situation, and she entered our house the following day."

"What has all this got to do with young Chase-more?"

"How impatient you are. Cannot you trust to me to tell you? I was thrown a good deal with this girl in teaching her her duties, and I soon found out there was a mystery about her. She used to cry terribly at night. I have been kept awake for hours listening to her sobbing and to the broken sentences she murmured in her sleep, and before long I taxed her with something she had said, and under a solemn promise of secrecy she told me her history."

"Anything out of the way?"

"Yes, a very sad one; but I mustn't repeat the

particulars. I cannot even tell you what I wish to, unless you will swear never to reveal it until we are certain of its truth."

"I swear I will not. You may trust me not to expose myself by following a wild goose chase."

"It seems this woman, Belton (Belton she says is not her real name) is married and ran away from her husband. Can you guess why?"

"Never could guess anything in my life, Janet!"

"Because her child was stolen from her."

"But who stole it?"

"She says her husband did, that it was taken from her side whilst she was asleep, and when she found out her loss she went out of her mind and ran away from him. But the curious part of the story is that the child was a boy and born in the beginning of September, the very same date as the other."

"Pooh, pooh, nonsense! my dear girl," said the baronet smiling; "you are never going to frame a romance on such a slender foundation as that. Do you know how many children are born on an average every week in the year in London?"

"Yes, yes; of course I do, a thousand of each sort. But that's only the beginning of my story. When I questioned Belton, why she suspected her husband of stealing her child from her, she said she

believed he had sold it, because he would do anything for money, and that some time before he had betrayed her best friend for fifty pounds, and she had never seen him since. Of course this 'best friend' excited my curiosity, and I tried hard to get his name out of the girl, but nothing would make her reveal it. However, a few nights afterwards she was so unusually restless and talkative in her sleep that I entered her room with the view of rousing her, and heard her exclaim 'Where's Mr. Waverley, he would find my baby for me? Oh! where is Mr. Alfred Waverley? He would see that justice was done to me.'"

"Nonsense, Janet!" cried Sir Arthur, with real interest, "she never said that."

"She did, indeed! When I was next talking to her I asked: 'Did you ever know Mr. Alfred Waverley, the actor?' and she got crimson in a moment and denied the fact. I taxed her with what she had said in her sleep, but she stuck to it that she had only seen him once or twice. Then I said, 'Do you think Mr. Waverley stole your child?' And she replied, 'Oh, no, ma'am! for he's a married gentleman himself and I daresay has plenty of children of his own.' So I think that if this woman's baby was stolen for that purpose that she has no cognisance of it."

"God bless my soul, Janet! And do you really imagine you can trace any link between your servant's loss and Regina Chasemore's baby?"

"I think this, Sir Arthur. That the man who received fifty pounds for finding your cousin, would be very likely to earn another fifty if he could by selling his own child. A man of his class would probably imagine he was doing the infant a great benefit by giving it the chance of being reared as a gentleman."

"But who could have applied to him in the matter? If I remember rightly, old Farthingale could never find out for certain, who did claim that reward."

"I can't tell you more than I know, and Belton, although she is a very soft, stupid sort of woman, won't let out a word more than she chooses. To all my questions she only returns the answer, 'Please don't ask me, miss.' I am convinced that nothing would have extracted the name of Alfred Waverley from her, had she been awake, and I am sure she is unusually interested in him from her agitation when I mentioned his name, but where *can* such a woman have known him?"

"That might be easily accounted for. Vivian associated with all sorts of low people whilst he pursued that disgraceful profession. But how came

this woman's husband, who earned the fifty pounds reward, to be mixed up with this other affair? Surely old Farthingale can never have had a hand in it?"

"No! no! no! No man would ever meddle with such a dirty plot! Depend upon it, it was got up between those two Chasemore women, whilst the husband was abroad, to cheat him into believing he had got an heir. Now, what do you think of my putting this and that together, Sir Arthur?"

"I think you are the most wonderful little woman in the world."

"Don't go too fast. I may be mistaken after all. Still, when *your* interests are at stake, the matter is at least worth consideration."

"By Jove! I should think so! I have not forgotten the trick Mrs. Vivian Chasemore played me once before, and would incur any trouble or expense to expose such an atrocious fraud on her part now."

"Ah! I am afraid you think a great deal too much of her still, Sir Arthur, if you would go such lengths to obtain your revenge."

"Not in the way you imagine, Janet. I have got over my disappointment long ago, though I can't quite forgive her for it; but I am not likely to let myself be gulled a second time, and particularly

when she has perpetrated this deception (if deception it be) simply to ruin my interests."

"It is the vilest thing I ever heard of," acquiesced Miss Oppenheim, "and we must not rest until we have reached the bottom of it."

"I am afraid the truth will be very difficult to arrive at, especially as you have bound yourself to secrecy."

"Will you leave it to me? You know that I am your friend and that I am working entirely for you. Will you be patient whilst I worm myself further into this woman's confidence and try to make her betray herself."

"I would trust everything I possess in your hands with the greatest confidence," replied the baronet growing enthusiastic, as he kissed Miss Oppenheim beneath the cover of the dusk.

Janet drew coyly away from him, not as if she were displeased, but only reticent. She knew that men care little for what they can obtain without cost, and had no intention of selling herself too cheap a bargain.

"Can you meet me here again, let us say next Sunday, Sir Arthur, and at the same hour? Miss Netherwood is never able to go out in the evenings and I am free to follow my own inclinations. Perhaps by that time I may have some news for you."

"I will come without fail, my dear. By Jove! only fancy if it should be true. What an awful sell for poor Vivian, who is as proud over the youngster as a peacock with a tin tail."

"It will serve him right for marrying such an artful designing woman. He knew she had jilted you and might have guessed there was no good in her."

"I am afraid he has not made much of a bargain," replied Sir Arthur. "It's enough to make a man think twice before he rushes into matrimony."

"Only that all women are not like her," interposed Miss Janet softly.

"By George, no! I know one, and not so far off either, who is worth a dozen of her, twice told. But I suppose you can't guess who that is, eh, Janet?"

"I have not the least idea, Sir Arthur," said Miss Oppenheim, as she quietly shook hands with him and slipped away.

She was a good tactician and did not open the Belton siege until she had formed her plan of operations, and found a favourable opportunity for commencing. She had little fear of failure, or at least of failing to find out all that there might be to discover in that servant's past history. For Janet Oppenheim possessed in a high degree that mar-

vellous magnetic or mesmeric power, which enables its owner to draw others to them almost against their own will, and which she had never known to prove impotent except with those who bore her a preconceived aversion. She was very soft and gentle in her manners with the servants: too familiar some people would have called her, but as she had always been more or less dependent on that class for her comfort in life she had found her condescension stand her in good stead. She would sit with them of an evening and interest herself (or profess to do so) in all their work or home affairs, questioning them as openly as though they were her equals, whilst she appeared to be as confidential with them in return. So that all the menials at Clarence Lodge, thought her "a very affable young lady, though a bit near with the supper vittles," and were always wishing her "as good a 'usband as she deserved, and as many friends as there were days in the year."

The soft-hearted, friendless Mrs. Belton (whom everyone will have recognised as no other than our poor shiftless Bonnie), was scarcely likely to shut up her lonely soul from the unexpected kindness of such a sociable young lady; and, indeed, in her childish, timid way she had already begun to lean upon Miss Oppenheim as her counsellor and stay in

life. There was only one feeling stronger than gratitude in her breast which kept her lips closed, when Alfred Waverley was mentioned to her. But for the rest, so long as she did not disclose the name that might identify her to her husband, it was a solace in the midst of her misery to be able to talk about it all.

CHAPTER X.

“I CAN’T HELP CRYING FOR MY BABY.”

IN order to explain how Bonnie came to be a schoolroom-maid in Miss Netherwood’s service, it will be necessary to go back a little. It will be remembered that the last time Mrs. Bull saw her, she left her in bed with her baby, too sleepy to take her tea or answer questions. Neither of the women knew then how the drowsiness had come upon her, although it was found out afterwards that Kit Masters had administered a soporific to his wife under cover of the medicine. As soon as her neighbour left her, Bonnie fell into a profound slumber, from which she never roused till late at night, when some instinct warned her that it was time to nurse her infant. She was only half-conscious as she put out her hand to the side of the bed where

the baby usually lay, and found an empty space there. Then she woke thoroughly, and, searching the bed all over without success, leapt from it with a loud cry, as the idea darted into her mind that whilst she slept her child had fallen from her arms and been killed. The noise brought Kit Masters upstairs.

"What are ye yellin' for?" he demanded roughly.

"My baby!" exclaimed the terrified girl. "Where is my baby? I cannot find it anywhere. Oh, Kit, have you got it downstairs? Did you take it along of you?"

"*Along of me!*" he growled. "What d'ye suppose I should take a squalling brat into the shop for? to wake up the whole street. I've had more 'n enough of 'is yells, I can tell ye. I aren't 'ad a proper night's rest since the little hanimal was born, and I won't stand it no longer, and that's the hend of the matter."

"But *where* is it?" repeated Bonnie wildly. "Give it to me, Kit. I will keep it quiet. It shall never worry you again. I'll sit up all night with it rather. Only it is so young; it shouldn't have been took out of the bed."

She was hurrying on a pair of slippers and a dark tweed cloak that had served her as a dressing-gown as she spoke, though her trembling hands

would hardly permit her to do the fastenings. Only she was so anxious to go into the other room and fetch back her baby. "He would be so cold," she thought, "lying there alone."

"Now, ye jist lie down agin," said Kit sharply. "I'm not going to 'ave you catch your death o' cold for that blessed babby. Lie down, I say, and cover the clothes over you."

"Yes, Kit, I will—only give me back my baby. He must be very hungry, it is such a long time since I nursed him. You shall see how quiet we will be, lying here together."

"Well, then, I can't give 'im you, and so there. You'd better hear the truth at once."

The mother's eyes almost started from her head with fear.

"You *can't* give him to me! Oh, Kit, tell me, quick—what is the matter? Is he dead?"

"Not as I knows on."

"Where is he, then?"

"I can't tell you that, neither; but 'e's well provided for, and you must be content to know it."

"'Well provided for!'" repeated Bonnie in a dazed voice.

"Yes, much better than you could do for 'im, and with a person as knows all about babbies and their ways. I told you a'ready that I couldn't stand

no more of his screechin', nor I can't spare you to be a-hangin' arter 'im day and night. And so I've put 'im hout to nuss, where 'e'll be safe took care on, and you can git about all the sooner and tend to your dooties."

But Bonnie did not quite comprehend him.

"Have you took him away?" she said in a fearful whisper. "Won't they bring him back again? Shan't I sleep along 'im to-night?"

Masters broke out into a hoarse laugh.

"No, you won't, my dear, so the sooner you makes hup yer mind to it the better. You'll see 'im again, maybe, if he grows hup, but I'll be whipt if I'll 'ave 'im a cuttin' about 'ere and givin' trouble for the next ten years. I've shipped him hoff to the country, where 'e'll be a deal better looked arter than here; so hall you've got to do his to get to bed agin, and make the best of it—for the job was done four hours ago and more, and there's no undoin' it."

"My baby! Oh, my baby!" shrieked Bonnie, in that voice of despair that reached Mrs. Bull's ears, as she flew past her husband and ran downstairs.

At first he did not follow her. He believed she had merely gone to search the house for the infant, and chuckled in his brutal manner to himself as he thought how her trouble would be wasted. But he

was startled when he heard the shop-door slam. He jumped up and looked from the window then, fearful of the neighbours' tongues if Bonnie appealed to them in her excited condition, and made her wrongs public. But all he saw was a dark figure flying down the street as though it scarcely touched the ground, and, with an oath at her and all women, he stumbled downstairs, with the intent to follow and bring her back. He undid the door, and stared up and down the street, but Bonnie had totally disappeared; and Mr. and Mrs. Bull were ready to confront and pester him with the inquiries already related, until he was completely out of temper with them and himself, and retired to rest determined to do nothing at all. "Such an infernal fuss," as he expressed it, "for a wretched squaller of four days old, whom he'd as soon have drowned as a kitten!"

Meanwhile, Bonnie flew like the wind in the direction of Waterloo Bridge. She hardly knew where she was going, or what she wanted; but her head and her heart were on fire with the one awful thought that Kit Masters had stolen her baby from her, and that she should never see him more. A policeman met her rushing at the top of her speed down the Strand, and hailed her to know her business. But she never heeded him, nor arrested her footsteps for a moment; and as she passed beneath

a lamp and he caught sight of her uncovered head and wild appearance, he crossed the road and followed in her wake. On—on—she ran, the policeman keeping well behind her, for he could not have overtaken her without using still greater speed, until she came in sight of the still waters sleeping in the moon-light, and the cool breeze from across the river stirred the light garment she wore and made her shiver. The official in pursuit expected to see the poor creature halt near the parapets of that "Bridge of Sighs," which has proved the entrance to the Gates of Death for so many, and fully intended as soon as the girl did so, to arrest and lead her away. But he was scarcely prepared to see her bound, without pause or hesitation, upon the stone coping of the bridge and fling herself headlong into the river. Without a cry or apparently the slightest fear Bonnie sprung forward to meet her doom, as if she were rushing into the embraces of a mother. But help was close at hand, and she had scarcely sunk before the policeman had summoned it, and she was dragged from the water and hauled into a boat. Short as the time of her immersion was, however, it was long enough to render her insensible. The unnaturally heated condition of both mind and body was sufficient to make the shock almost fatal, and for weeks afterwards Bonnie lay in a hospital

completely unconscious of all that had befallen her. As she recovered her strength and her senses the people about her became most anxious to ascertain her name and address, but they could get nothing out of her. She lay in her bed with closed eyes and silent lips until they began to suspect her of being sillier than she really was. When the time arrived for her discharge, the doctor was quite uneasy to think what would become of the poor shiftless child thrown on the tender mercies of the world; and the matron, who had been attracted by Bonnie's mournful eyes and pertinacious silence, offered to give her house-room for a little while until she could get a situation of some sort and work for her living. From this circumstance rose the idea of her going out as a servant. The matron finding the girl almost as reticent when alone with her as she had been in the hospital, advised her to put her name down on the books of a registry office, to which end she appropriated some of the money given her by the sympathetic doctor as a little help upon the path of life. Thus it came to pass that Bonnie fell in with Miss Janet Oppenheim, and was engaged as school-room-maid at Clarence Lodge. Her duties lay entirely upstairs, and as they included a good deal of needle work, which she executed in Janet's room, it naturally followed that that young lady and her-

self often spent some of the evening hours together. On the day when Miss Oppenheim had decided to try and gain her further confidence, Bonnie was sitting as usual, stitching away at some house linen. She looked very staid and pretty in her print dress and white cap, with her fair soft hair parted neatly on her forehead; but her face had grown very thin, and there were lines about the childish quivering mouth that had never been there before. The trouble poor Bonnie had passed through had cleared and strengthened her brain, and made her more womanly than she had ever been before. She would never be clever (live as long as she might), but the "daft" look of which her old grandmother had complained, seemed to have been lost in the plaintively quiet expression which now pervaded her features. That she could hold her own was proved by the pertinacity with which she refused to give Janet any information of importance respecting herself, for with the exception of talking of her little baby, she was almost obstinate. But touching that, she felt she must have relief. Her mother's heart would have broken with longing despair if she could not sometimes have indulged it with weeping for her lost little one.

Janet entered the room with some needlework in her own hands. It was evident that she intended

to spend some time in the company of her servant. She sat down beside Bonnie as naturally as though they had been sisters, and smiled kindly in the blue eyes that were raised to her own.

"Well, Belton, how are you getting on with the pillow-cases? Rather hard sewing, I am afraid, but like most disagreeable things, they must be done."

Bonnie, who had never been famous as a seamstress, regarded her pricked fingers with a deprecatory look.

"Yes, miss, the stuff be hard—I mean, it *is* hard—though I've rubbed it well too."

Miss Oppenheim had been correcting Bonnie's grammar amongst other things, until the girl had begun to be ashamed of speaking in the old way.

"Let me soap that seam for you, Belton. It will be twice as easy then. And your thimble is too large. You can never work comfortably with it. I will lend you mine. I have another in my basket."

"Thank you, miss! You are so very kind to me," said Bonnie, gratefully.

It was by such little acts of attention, politically bestowed, that Janet Oppenheim owed her success in getting her own way with both the upper and lower classes.

"Oh, it is nothing, Belton! Is is my object to get the work done, you know. And I am hemming

these frills to trim them with. They are for Miss Netherwood's pillows. She is very particular about the appearance of her bed, and has always been used to have frilled pillow-cases."

"I don't think Miss Netherwood would know how to get on without you, miss."

"Don't you? But she may have to do it all the same, Belton."

"You're not going away from us?" cried Bonnie, in real distress, as she grasped Janet's black silk apron.

"No! no! not at present, at all events. Still I do not suppose I shall live here always. I might marry some day."

"Oh, *don't* you marry, miss!" exclaimed the girl earnestly, "it's a bad job, that marriage, for any poor woman. See how I suffered from it. It a'most killed me."

"Poor thing! yes, I know it did; but then you had a very bad husband, Belton. All men are not so bad as he was. Perhaps you married in too great a hurry and had not seen sufficient of him."

"No! I didn't," was the mournful answer. "For months and months I wouldn't have him nor even speak to him, but grandmother said he was such a likely fellow, and could keep me so well that t'would be a sin to say 'no' to him."

"Your grandmother was mistaken evidently, for he seems to have been the worst husband I ever heard of."

"Yes, miss, he was. The very worst."

"You must try and not think about it, Belton. You will make yourself quite ill if you cry so much."

"I can't help crying for my poor baby, miss. He was such a dear little fellow and the very image of me. I feel as if my heart would break whenever I remember him."

"If it really relieves your mind to speak of him, Belton, of course I would not forbid your doing so. You can talk as you will to me, you know. I shall never repeat what you say."

"I know you won't, miss, and it's been a great comfort to me to open my heart to you as I have. The nights are the worst part of it, when I can't speak to you. I wake up sometimes and fancy I've got his little head aside of me, and, when I remember as I shall never see him again, I feel as if I should go mad."

"Are you *sure* you will never see him again?" demanded Janet deliberately, as she looked Bonnie in the face.

"Why, how can I, miss, when that brute stole him out of my very bed, and sent him away to the

country? I know nothing about the precious child—who's got him, nor where he went. We can't never meet until the Judgment Day."

"But because your husband did not choose to tell you where the baby was gone, is no reason that we should not find out, Belton. Of course, it will take time and trouble, and we might be disappointed, after all; but if his loss makes you so miserable, surely it is worth the attempt."

The pillow-case dropped from Bonnie's hand, as she turned startled eyes of surprise and inquiry upon Janet Oppenheim.

"Miss, miss! do you mean as you think I could ever find my baby again?"

"Why not? If the child is alive he must be somewhere, and you have a right to know where that is. Your husband cannot have sent him away without the knowledge of some other people—his parents, perhaps; and I feel sure that proper inquiries would elicit intelligence concerning him."

Bonnie sunk on her knees and, hiding her face in Miss Oppenheim's dress, burst into a flood of excited tears.

"Oh, miss!" she sobbed, "Oh, miss! if you could find my little boy for me again, I would serve you without wages to the very last day of my life."

"Come, Belton, don't be foolish. I will help

you in every way I can, if you will be quite open with me. Dry your eyes, and let us sit down and talk the matter over quietly. Miss Netherwood has gone out for the afternoon, and will not be back until late. We have a good time to ourselves, and you can speak as freely as you choose."

"What can I tell you more, miss?" replied Bonnie, as she settled herself to her work again.

"Why, I don't even know your husband's name, nor where he lives. How could I set anybody to find out where the baby is, unless he is told the name and address of the person who sent him away, or, as you say, stole him."

"I'm sure he stole him," retorted Bonnie. "What should he want to pay for my child being nursed out for? He wasn't over and above free with his money, miss; and the poor baby would have cost him nothing at home."

"That is one point of importance," said Janet, as she noted the fact in her pocket-book. "But then, on the other hand, what should he steal the boy for?"

"To sell him, maybe," replied Bonnie bitterly; "he was such a beautiful baby—anyone might have been glad to buy him. He had blue eyes, almost as big as mine, and yellow hair on his head as soft

as gosling's-down, and such pretty little toes and fingers."

The poor young mother, in her excess of vanity, had hit the right nail on the head, although she little believed it.

"Come, Belton," said Janet laughing, "stick to reason. Whoever heard of a baby being sold? Who would buy it? People have generally more children of their own than they know what to do with."

"Yes, miss, so I've heard; still my husband was just the man to part with his own flesh and blood for money. He loved money as his soul, so I don't believe he would have ever troubled about the child, unless it was to bring him something."

"You must tell me your real name, you know, Belton, if I'm to do you any good."

"Will it send me back to Kit, miss? because if it do I'll throw myself into the river again first."

"I *promise* you it shall not. What object could I have in betraying you to him. I should gain nothing and lose a good servant. I want to find your baby for you, Belton, and if I can, you shall both be sent away together wherever you may choose, so that Kit—if that's the man's name, may never hear of you again. I have more money than you think for, and I promise you this upon my sacred word of honour."

Bonnie could not disbelieve so solemn an assurance, and the idea of regaining her child broke down all her resolutions of preserving secrecy.

"Oh, miss! I must trust you, but remember I'll kill myself sooner than go back to him. His name is Kit Masters, miss. Christopher Masters that is, and he's a greengrocer as lives at number nine in Little Tobago Street at the back of Drury Lane. Mrs. Bull, the butcher's wife as lives round the corner, was a good friend to me and grandmother, and knows that all I've told you is the gospel truth. But you'll never betray me, miss, will you?"

"Never, my poor girl! You need have no fear of it. And so your name is Mary Masters. However, I must go on calling you Belton, so that is of little consequence."

"Miss Netherwood won't never know of it, miss, nor the other servants," continued poor Bonnie, dropping a few quiet tears. She was half afraid now that she had let out her cherished secret, whether she had not been rash, but the thought of her baby surmounted every other.

"Certainly not! But now I want you, Belton, to tell me all you can remember about your child. The day he was born and the day he was taken away from you, what clothes he had got on at the

time and as exact a description of his appearance as you can give me."

"He was born on the twenty-seventh of last August, miss, at three in the afternoon. Mrs. Bull was along of me at the time as has had seven herself, and she said he was the finest child she'd ever——"

"Yes, yes, Belton, I understand all that. Well, he was born on the twenty-seventh. What day was he stolen from you?"

"On the thirty-first, miss. He was getting on so beautiful and filling out as fast as could be, and we had been sleeping together all day, and when I woke up in the night, my poor baby was gone and I've never seen him since."

"He was only four days old then, when you lost him."

"Just so, miss! And I went quite wild when I found it out and throwd myself in the river."

"Stop a minute! Did your husband ever hint to you that you would have to part with the child or that he meant to put it out to nurse?"

"Never, miss! He used to swear at its screaming when Mrs. Bull washed it, but I thought nothing of that. Kit was allays swearing."

"What did he say when you awoke and missed the baby?"

"He said he'd shipped him off to the country (oh, I mind it so well! I can remember every word!), and that I should never see him again till he was grow'd up, may be, but he was well provided for, and I must be content with that."

"Why didn't you ask where he had sent him?"

"Oh! I did, miss. I asked again and again; but he said first that he didn't know, and then that the dear baby was with some one who could take much better care of him than I could (as if any one could love him like his mother!) and that he wouldn't stand his screeching and screaming. And then, when I cried he said I must make the best of it, for the job was done and couldn't be undone again."

"Are you sure he said that?"

"The very words, miss. Every one's burned in upon my brain. They told me at the hospital that I kept repeating them over and over again all the while I lay ill."

"Belton! the more I think of this business, the more I feel inclined to agree with you that your husband sold the baby to some one."

"Oh, they'll never give him up again, then!" cried the poor mother, with clasped hands.

"If we trace them, they must. It's not lawful to sell a child in this country. But it will take a long

time to find out, and you must try and be patient. Let me hear your description of the baby over again."

"He was a big boy, miss, and weighed a good twelve pounds when he was born. And he had blue eyes and soft light hair (there! just the moral of mine), and such a curious little mark on his left ear."

"A mark," exclaimed Janet, quickly, "that is of the utmost importance, Belton."


"Why, miss?" she asked, simply.

"Because, you goose! don't you know that all little babies are alike, and if they have no distinguishing mark it is almost impossible to tell one from the other. Tell me all you can about the baby's ear."

"It was so funny, miss; I never seed such a thing before, but Mrs. Bull said they called it a 'pig's ear' down her country side, and that the baby would be a rare greedy little fellow."

"Mrs. Bull saw it too, then?"

"Oh yes, miss! the very day they took him from me. She came in to give me my tea, but I was too sleepy to take it. But I showed her the baby's ear. It rose on the top with a white lump like a currant, that made it look square, and for all the world like a little pig's."



"Should you know it again if you saw it, Belton?"

"*Know it again*, miss?" echoed Bonnie, with overflowing eyes. "Oh! I should know my dear baby anywheres. He wasn't one to be mistook."

"To be mistaken!" corrected Janet, quickly. "Now there is another question I want to ask you, Belton. You mentioned to me once that your husband had betrayed a friend of yours for fifty pounds. Was not that friend Mr. Alfred Waverley?"

The blood rushed in a torrent over poor Bonnie's brow and bosom, dyeing them crimson; and for a few moments she could do no more than bend her head over her work in silence.

"These little matters are more difficult to keep secret than you think for, Belton. Mr. Waverley is a well-known gentleman, and everybody has heard of his being discovered by means of a fifty-pound reward."

"Do you know him, miss?" demanded Bonnie, in a low voice.

"No, I do not, but I am acquainted with several persons who do."

"Oh! if I could only speak to him for a minute," said Bonnie, still blushing from the effort of mentioning his name. "I think he would help me! He

was always so good and kind to me, Mr. Waverley was. I am sure he would help to find my poor baby."

Janet saw her way now to bribing the girl into further confidence.

"You *shall* see him, if you wish it," she answered stoutly. "I will answer for that, and between us all, Belton, it will be hard if we cannot do something to help you out of this scrape."

"Oh, miss! how good you are!"

"But where did you become acquainted with Mr. Waverley?"

The question succeeded so naturally that Bonnie answered it without consideration.

"He lodged at grandmother's, miss, for many years."

"Ah! when he was on the stage? And he was found there, of course?"

"Yes, miss."

"And Masters was the person to give up his address."

"Yes, miss."

"Then you must have seen the lawyer, Mr. Farthingale?"

"A red-headed, foxy little gentleman, miss? Yes; *he* came one day to see grandmother. That was before I was married, a goodish bit."

"Ah! you didn't marry till after Mr. Waverley had left you? Well, Belton, I am afraid you made a sorry bargain. It is almost enough to frighten one from following your example."

"Yes, miss. But if you can find my baby for me, and—and—Mr. Waverley could be brought to hear of it, I know he'd help me; and I think I should feel almost happy again."

"I will do my very best," replied Janet rising; "but remember, Belton, you must be patient, and follow my advice in all things. I know you can hold your tongue, so I do not caution you against chattering; but I warn you that you may have to wait some weeks, or even months, before you hear the intelligence you are longing for, and it can only be brought about by your obeying implicitly everything that I tell you."

"Oh, I'll be as good as good, miss—indeed I will!" replied the girl earnestly, as she bent her moistened eyes upon her work again; and Janet Oppenheim left the room, having drawn every available piece of information out of her poor simple little heart.

When she related the conversation to Sir Arthur, as they walked together in a sequestered part of St. John's Wood, on the following Sunday evening,

it really seemed to form a very circumstantial chain of evidence against Mrs. Vivian Chasemore.

"You see there is but one link missing to render the story complete, Sir Arthur, and that is the identification of the infant in Premier Street with the infant that was born in Drury Lane."

"True; but that seems the most difficult part of the business to me. Who is to identify a child lost sight of at four days' old?"

"I agree with you. The mother's recognition would not be sufficient, even though the boy appears to have been marked, for two children might be marked alike. Therefore it will be quite necessary to get one of the confederates to betray herself as well."

"Which would do so?"

"Mrs. General Chasemore! You know she has a world-wide reputation for drinking, and a woman who drinks has neither brain nor discretion. She is sure to let out the secret in her cups."

"That would be useless, unless there were more than one witness by to hear the confession and expose it."

"I know that, therefore I intend to be one of those witnesses and to provide the other. Then, when Mrs. General Chasemore denies her own words

and Mrs. Vivian backs her deceit, I will produce Belton to recognise the child."

"How will you gain access to them?"

"I am going to tell you all my plans. Miss Netherwood's sister comes to stay with her next week, and she has just offered me a month's holiday, which I have accepted. That will give me the time and opportunity to put them into execution and to succeed, if success is obtainable."

"Janet! you are the most wonderful little manœvrer I ever met with."

"I am doing it all for your sake, Sir Arthur."

"Why address me so formally? Does not an intimacy of three years' standing warrant a little more familiarity? I always call you 'Janet.'"

"I know you do, but there should be more reticence in a woman's tongue than in that of a man. We are only friends."

"Are you quite sure of that, Janet? Has it never struck you that our relations are assuming a somewhat warmer character than that of friendship?"

"I don't know what you mean—Arthur," said pussy-cat, with downcast eyes.

"Listen to me, then, and I will tell you."

CHAPTER XI.

"NO LIKENESS IN HIM TO EITHER OF THEM."

MRS. VIVIAN CHASEMORE, notwithstanding her house in Premier Street, her carriage and horses, her security from future poverty, and her son and heir, was miserable! Her husband's return, to which she had looked forward with more pleasurable anticipation than she had ever felt in her life before, had only filled her breast with apprehension and alarm. He had become so suddenly and absurdly fond of *the child!* Regina had hoped and imagined that the supposed birth would make Vivian prouder and fonder of herself, and smooth over the unhappy differences which had lately marred their married life and caused her more secret grief than her pride would permit her to acknowledge. But she had not expected that whilst he did not much more than keep on friendly terms with herself, he would lavish all the love for which, now that it appeared to be slipping from her grasp, she had commenced to pine, upon his supposititious son.

It turned her sick with envy to see the caresses Vivian gave the little one, or to hear him talking fondly to it when they were alone together and there was no one to laugh at his paternal weakness. Her

jealousy urged her to be almost rough with the baby, and the idea that she did not care for it, made her husband still warmer in his expressions of affection.

"You don't love our little boy, Regina," he said reproachfully one day, when he and she and the infant were alone in her dressing-room, and he had held the little fellow up to her to receive an indifferent caress.

"Oh! yes, I do! but I never cared for young babies, Vivian. They are all so much alike."

"Well, I used to think the same before this little chap came, but every day seems to make a difference in him now. Look! how he's staring at that prismatic glass. I'm sure he sees the changing colours in it! Have you ever noticed what a strangely-shaped ear he has, Regina!"

"No! which ear?"

"The left! Look at it! It is nearly square."

"It will be very ugly when he grows up!"

"What a shame! He's going to be the bonniest boy in England. Tell naughty mamma to kiss you, baby, and beg your pardon for calling anything about you 'ugly.'"

He put the child into Regina's arms as he spoke, but she held it so awkwardly that it puckered up its mouth and began to cry. It was not the poor girl's

fault. The beautiful instinct of maternity that transforms every mother, however young, into a nurse, had never come to her assistance. The baby cried, and she did not know how to soothe it.

"Do ring for the nurse, Vivian. He gets more fractious every day. I wish he would grow a little faster. Children are so much nicer when they can run about."

"And then you will want to put him into a jacket and knickerbockers and hurry him off to school," said Vivian warmly. "I wish you showed a little more interest in him, Regina. It seems so unnatural that you should not do so."

"I am sure I do everything I can for him," she answered quickly. (The term "unnatural" alarmed her.) "He has the best nursery and the best nurse in London. Mrs. Fleming is quite devoted to the child and thinks nothing too good for him."

"And no more she ought," said Vivian as he walked to the window and drummed upon the panes to attract the infant's notice. Amongst men he would have been as shy as most young fathers of acknowledging the affection he had conceived for this little child; but he felt his heart growing closer to it, day by day, and spent hours in dreaming of a future when he and his son should be friends and com-

panions and bear the burden of life for one another.

"Oh! Vivian! you are making such a dreadful noise," pleaded Regina fretfully.

He sighed and walking away from the window gave the infant a coloured scent-bottle to play with, which it immediately thrust into its mouth.

"I have wanted to speak to you, Regina, ever since I came home, about something, but I have not had courage to introduce the subject for two reasons. First, because you have been ill and I cannot bear to annoy you, and secondly, because it is such an unpleasant one."

"If it is unpleasant, Vivian, for Heaven's sake keep it to yourself."

"No! that is impossible, and the sooner I speak the sooner it will be over. Mrs. General Chasemore was here yesterday afternoon, was she not?"

"Yes! How can I refuse myself to her after all she has done for me?"

"I acknowledge it will be difficult to break off the acquaintance again, and I am very sorry for it. But I cannot have your good name suffer because this woman happened to be in the hotel when you were taken ill."

"If she hadn't been there, I might have died," murmured Regina.

"So she wrote to me, and no words can express the gratitude I felt to think you had help at hand. Still ought I on that account to permit you to endure the society for life of a person whom I know to be a most disreputable connection? If Mrs. Chasemore had any delicacy, she would not come here, after what passed between us, but she has none. I must leave it to you, therefore, to break off the intimacy as quickly as possible."

"I am sure *I* don't know how to do it!"

"How did you manage to cut Mrs. Henry Lascelles and Lady Duncan when you heard of their antecedents?" demanded Vivian sternly.

"Neither of them was my husband's step-mother."

"Bother the stepmotherhood! We owe Mrs. Chasemore no extra duty on that account, rather less! She inveigled my poor father into marrying her when she knew that had he possessed an inkling of her true character he would have fled her as a pestilence. Regina! I have not told you half of that woman's profligacy. I did not like to pollute the ears of my wife with such stories. But her drinking propensities are perhaps the least of her crimes. She is a known vicious character, and I will not permit her to darken my doors!"

"Oh! I hope you are not going to begin that

subject all over again. One would think *I* had brought Mrs. Chasemore into your family. She was not *my* father's wife."

"My dear Regina, I am not blaming you for the present inconvenience; though it is an old sore of mine, as you well know. It has been the cause of great unhappiness—to me at least—for when I parted with you last May, I did not care if I ever came home again or not. So, added to all the past, she is now doubly odious to me, when I think how nearly she wrecked our lives. But all I ask of you is to do your best in the future. Deny yourself to her when she calls—make what excuses you can—but let her see that you are determined not to carry on the acquaintanceship. I would have given anything that she should not have been *the* one elected by Fate to be present at your confinement!"

"So would I," acquiesced Regina, and sincerely, for she was beginning to fear that Mrs. General Chasemore might not be a very safe person to quarrel with.

"It was truly unfortunate! I have never understood how the old woman happened to be at the same inn with you, nor why the landlady could not have attended to you herself," said Vivian. "And what on earth were you doing at such a time wander-

ing about alone in an out-of-the-way place like Pays la Reine?"

"I had Selina Farthingale with me," stammered Regina, who felt she sank deeper in the mire every time the dreaded subject was broached.

"And you seem to have struck up such a friendship for that old maid too! I thought you hated her before our marriage."

"Oh! no! it was not quite so bad as that! I don't care much for her, even now, but she was very kind to me whilst you were away. Don't be hard on me, Vivian. I was very lonely and—and—miserable, and whatever I did wrong, I did for your sake," said Regina, relapsing into tears. So unusual a mood on her part, softened him at once.

"Don't cry, my angel! I am not angry. I only want to caution and advise you. There! baby! go and cuddle in your mother's arms and tell her we both love her dearly."

But Regina pushed the infant away.

"I only want *you*," she whispered, as she laid her wet face against that of Vivian.

"Well, you *have* me, dear, fast enough, I'm sure," he answered, laughing; "and there's no one to dispute your rights, unless it be this young monkey *here*; and if you find him a nuisance, why it's all your own fault, you know, and you must grin and bear it."

How well she knew it to be her own fault! How often she had wished even by this time, that she could have been content to try and win back her husband's affection by herself, and leave the future with God.

"Shall I send him away? Does he annoy you?" asked Vivian, as she lay back on the sofa with closed eyes and knitted brow.

"I have one of my bad headaches," she answered, and he rung the bell for the nurse.

The door opened, and a stranger stood on the threshold.

"Mrs. Fleming is occupied for the moment, ma'am, and cannot come downstairs. Shall I take the baby up to her?"

"Yes, perhaps you had better do so."

The woman received the infant from Vivian's arms and carried it carefully away.

"Who is that, Regina? I never saw her before."

"She only came here yesterday evening. The upper housemaid had announced to me most unexpectedly in the morning that she must return home at once as her mother had broken her back, or some rubbish of that sort, but that her cousin would take her place whilst she was away. So, as servants are scarce, and I don't want to lose Ellen, I let the cousin

come, and that is she. Her name is Jane. She seems a decent enough body."

"Very much so! I like her appearance immensely. She looks so modest and has such a soft voice. I think Ellen had better stay away altogether."

"I don't know that Jane would remain if she did. Nurse told me this morning that she is engaged to be married. She seems to take a great interest in the baby. Perhaps that is the reason."

"I hope she will be very careful of him. These girls are so ignorant sometimes."

"Fleming will take care he comes to no harm."

"So much the better. Well, dear, I'll leave you now, and perhaps you will go to sleep and get rid of your headache. Don't fret about what I said to you, Regina. The task will be easier than you imagine, and after what she did for you and our baby I don't want to have to attack the old woman myself on the subject."

"Oh, no! pray don't!" cried Regina, nervously. "I will do all that is necessary, Vivian—indeed I will—and avoid her as much as possible for the future."

But when her husband had left her to get rid of her fictitious headache, Regina knew that she had promised more than she could possibly perform. It was all very well to tell her to drop Mrs. General

Chasemore, but that lady had already intimated pretty strongly that she had no intention of being dropped. Four months only had passed by since she had done Regina, what she called "the greatest service possible on earth," and she had already drawn more than once on her patience and time and purse, in return for the risk she had run in her behalf. The money was but a drop in the ocean. Vivian kept his wife so liberally supplied that ten, twenty, or even thirty pounds at a time was not seriously missed from her private funds; but when she found that Mrs. Chasemore intruded upon her, not in the dusk of the evening only or when she had been invited, as heretofore, but at any moment of the day, heedless whether she encountered the master of the house or not, Regina became seriously alarmed, for what might transpire if those two met and the lady was thrown off her guard, she was afraid to think. Mrs. Chasemore had once frightened her beyond measure by affirming that she had a rod in pickle for Master Vivian if he dared to insult her in the future. Her wretched victim had not been bold enough to ask her the meaning of her words, but she guessed it too well, and had been too timid since even to suggest that her visitor should choose more reasonable hours for calling at the house. Once she had appeared there when considerably the

worse for liquor, and Regina, blushing with shame that her servants should be witness to her own degradation in owning such a connection, had yet been obliged to entertain her for some hours whilst she strove by every means in her power to prevent her loud tones and unguarded words from making their way beyond the walls of her private sitting-room.

"Lor, my dear! and how's the child getting on?" she had exclaimed on that occasion. "I met it in the park the other day, and thought I should have burst out laughing in the nurse's face when she informed me it was growing more like its dear papa every day. Poor Vivian! What a costermonger's cut he must have about him."

"Oh hush! pray," entreated Regina with blanched cheeks; "the whole house will hear you, Mrs. Chase-more, if you do not take more care."

"Well, and what if they do? It needs more than a couple of words to settle a business of that kind. But what have you been doing to the brat? He looks very puny to me."

"I don't know why he should. Mrs. Fleming takes the greatest care of him, I believe. But she says he is like a child whose mother has fretted. She looked very suspiciously at me as she spoke."

"Ha! ha! ha! She has heard of Master Vivian's *escapade*, I suppose, in the servants' hall, and fancied it worried you and had an effect upon the child. She little thinks how philosophically you took it."

"But it did worry me!" replied Regina, with dignity. "I don't think you give me credit for maintaining even friendly relations with my husband, Mrs Chasemore."

"Oh don't try to humbug me!" exclaimed the older woman rudely; "I can see the terms you are on together perfectly. And as if you would have done what you *have* done if there had been the least affection between you! You like the money, my dear, and you would have sold your soul to secure it. That's the long and the short of the matter"

"I often wish I hadn't done it," sighed Regina. "I had better have sold my soul than established such a constant dread for myself. There is not a day but what I fear the whole thing may come out."

"Pooh! nonsense! how can it? unless you are fool enough to turn queen's evidence against yourself. You know Melina's staunch and so am I. By the way, my dear, I'm going to ask you to do me a little favour. My wretched quarterly pittance is not

due till the end of the month, and I have a horrid impudent fellow dunning me for a linen draper's bill. It's only twelve pounds. Can you lend me the money till Saturday week?"

"I think I can," replied Regina, as she rose and opened her *escritoire* to get the notes. But the secret drawer was empty. "I forgot," she added, suddenly, "I left my purse in the library yesterday. I will go and fetch it."

But as she was about to leave the room she heard Vivian's voice in the hall below.

"Oh! Mrs. Chasemore," she exclaimed, turning back with alarm. "My husband has come home. You must wait for the money till to-morrow."

"No such thing, my dear! it's quite impossible," replied the widow with an unmoved countenance. "I shall be thrown on my beam ends if I go without it. The man is to call again this evening, and I promised he should be paid."

"But Vivian is sure to be in the library! He will see me looking for my purse, and ask what I want it for. Perhaps he will follow me upstairs too."

"I can't help it if he does! I don't intend to take any more impertinence from him, I can tell you."

"But oh! Mrs. Chasemore, do please consider; if Vivian were to find you here, there might be another row, and it is so unpleasant before the servants."

"I will soon stop his tongue, my dear! I have it in my power to make a greater row than he if I feel so inclined."

"But if you would go now—you don't mind my speaking openly, do you? I will send you the notes by this evening's post without fail."

"They will be of no use to me then. I must have them by nine o'clock to-night."

"I will fetch them then," cried Regina in desperation; "only pray lock the door of the room inside, and let no one enter till I return."

She had to tell all sorts of fibs to get away from her husband, who wanted to detain her in the library whilst he related the day's adventures; but she managed to shake him off at last and return to the boudoir. The excitement and flurry of the affair, added to the difficulty of getting the half-intoxicated woman out of the house without being seen, afterwards made Regina quite ill, but it did not seem to have the least effect upon Mrs. General Chasemore.

"Lor', my dear," she said contemptuously, "you're far too nervous to undertake anything like an intrigue. You should have been one of the lovey-dovey-cooeey sort of wives, who consider it incumbent to tell their husbands every time they cut their nails. I should never be surprised to hear any day that

you had blabbed the whole story to him yourself. You're a very different sort of woman from what I expected. However, as you seem anxious to do the domestic, I'll relieve you of my presence. Good-bye! my love to Master Vivian Peregrine Chasemore and compliments to Monsieur son père—ha! ha! ha!"

And, under the guardianship of a servant the wretched woman had stumbled down-stairs whilst Regina hung over the banisters, watching with breathless fear lest Vivian should be disturbed by the noise, and leave the library to learn the reason of it.

But though no such *contretemps* occurred, the experience of that day and others like it, had convinced Regina that no frailer tenure for a secret could be found than the faith to be placed in Mrs. General Chasemore's feelings of prudence or honour. And she was not the only person either to be conciliated or feared. Selina Farthingale also came in for a share of the good things, and, although she was not in a position to require loans of money, she did not fail to make Regina feel her indebtedness to her in other ways.

By the time Vivian reached home, she had established an intimacy in the house which she never afterwards abandoned. Day after day (to the great disgust of Lady William Nettleship, who considered that the circumstance defrauded her of her

just rights) Miss Farthingale appeared in the carriage by the side of Mrs. Vivian Chasemore, or accompanied her to the theatres and other places of amusement. Vivian considered the intimacy a nuisance, and wished Regina would discontinue it. He had never liked Selina, and began to think he should never be alone with his wife again, so persistently did the old maid, as he called her, appear as a standing dish at their dinner-table. Once or twice he joked Regina on the subject, and asked her if her friend had better not bring her night-cap and take up her abode altogether in Premier Street, and was surprised to find that the joke fell flat or was received with a look of confusion or dismay.

Meanwhile Selina kept her footing manfully, and had come to be regarded as Mrs. Vivian Chasemore's most intimate friend. And poor Vivian wondered at it all, and held his peace. Regina's heart stood still as she considered by what means she should ever get rid of these two harpies, each of whom she firmly believed would have no hesitation in betraying her if no further benefit were to be derived from keeping her secret.

A wild thought flashed through her brain whether she could bribe the doctor to say she could not live in England, and make Vivian take her away

to America, or Australia, or some far off place, and commence a new life there with him, and—and— with baby. But the next moment she had almost smiled at her own simplicity. To what part of the world could she go, where letters could not follow and annoy her, and to what end had she connived at deceiving her husband, if she were compelled to resign all the delights of society and civilisation in order to carry out her plot with success. No; however difficult and thorny the path she had marked out for herself, she must tread it now without flinching. There was no going back, and there was no refusing to pay the debt she had incurred. She should never get rid of Mrs. General Chasemore nor Selina Farthingale. Her best hope must be that they would continue to cling to and be faithful to her. But how to deceive Vivian and yet retain the affection on which she was beginning to set so high a value?

Regina, as she thought of the difficulties in her way, wished that she had died before she had consented to make such a dupe of him. If the death of the child could have compassed her ends, I believe she could have found it in her heart to murder the poor innocent in order to be free to win back *her* husband's love with a clear conscience. But she *knew* that the baby's death would not release her

from the bondage in which she had enthralled herself. Two other women would still know the hateful secret and hold it *in terrorem* over her. So there seemed to be no hope nor help anywhere for Regina as she lay upon her couch and mourned over the consequences of her deceit.

Meanwhile, the new servant Jane had carried the infant in his beautiful lace robes and white satin ribbons safely to the nursery, where Mrs. Fleming was in the act of getting up some valuable lace.

"Here's the young gentleman," she said, as she entered the room. "It was his papa who gave him to me. What a handsome man he is, nurse! I am afraid baby will never be so good-looking."

"Well, no! he don't favour his papa, do he? I think he'll take more after the mistress, being so fair."

"I can't see any likeness in him to either of them, though I dare say he'll be a pretty enough little fellow when he grows up. But I never saw a child with so strange an ear!"

"Now what's to find fault with in the blessed innocent's ear!" exclaimed Fleming, quick, like all nurses, to take offence at any slur cast upon her charge.

"This little lump! it sticks out so."

"Bless you, that's nothing! I confess, when I first saw it, I thought it might want the knife, but I showed it to the doctor, and he said 'twould be hardly noticeable by-and-by. His old grandma made such a fuss over it when it caught her eye, declaring it had never come from her side of the family and all sich rubbish, that one would have thought the dear child had been born with an ear like a pumpkin."

"His grandmamma? What, Mrs. General Chase-more?"

"La bless you, no! That old sot's no grandma of his. I meant Lady William Nettleship."

"But is not Mrs. Chasemore Mr. Chasemore's mother?"

"Not a bit of it, only his stepma, and the most disgraceful old creature as I ever saw. Why, would you believe it, Jane? that Thomas tells me that the last time she called here, she was so drunk she could hardly get up the stairs."

"How horrible! I wonder the mistress likes to receive her."

"So do I, and particular as the master's always at her about it. Thomas says he's heard him *hammering* away at her by the hour together, and *all* because she will say she's at home to that old

figure. I wonder how she can find any pleasure in her company."

"Ellen told me that the mistress was all alone with Mrs. Chasemore when the baby was born."

"Ah! so I've heard, and it's a mercy she didn't kill them both then, for I suppose she was drunk as usual."

"Does she often come here?"

"Two and three times a week, and then you can hear her voice a hollerin' loud enough to rouse the street. And, by the way, look here, Jane! If ever she should come of an afternoon when the mistress is out, and the lady's-maid shouldn't be in the way, and you have to show her up to the boudoir, don't you give her any liquor—mind that!"

"But what am I to say if she asks for it?"

"Oh! tell the first lie you can think of. Say the butler's out, or the keys are lost, or anything. It's sherry she's so sweet upon! She'll never drink anything else, and Thomas says the way she pegs into it is something awful."

"Do you mean to say she *really* gets tipsy?"

"Bless you, yes; and when she is so, she doesn't care what she says. I've seen the mistress in a perfect fright and a terror sometimes how to get her out of the house again. And she talks so loud, you can hear her up here."

"What does she talk about?"

"All manner of things, but chiefly abuse of the master. There's no love lost between they two, you may take your oath of it. And the other old lady's nearly as bad. I should think the mistress must be driven nearly wild between them."

"She seems as if she was half worried to death with something or other. I shouldn't think she was a happy woman, to look at her."

"Between you and I, my dear, she's *not*, and that's the Bible truth. I know she gets very little sleep of nights, and you scarcely ever see her smile."

"Doesn't she care for the baby?"

"No more than if she'd picked it up out of the streets. It makes my blood boil sometimes to see how careless she is of it. It isn't, so to speak, a fine child, but I've seen many worse, and if a mother's not to care for a poor dear baby, who is?"

"Some women have no natural feelings," observed Jane.

"Ah! she hasn't, though one would think she'd be proud to have a little son, after waiting three years for it, too; but, there, some people never know when they're well off, in my opinion!"

Jane laid the baby gently down upon its bed, and left the room to look after her own work. But

the next time she met the lady's-maid upon the stairs, she informed her that she didn't care for going out herself, and that if ever Mrs. Rose wished to take an afternoon walk in the absence of her mistress, she would be very happy to undertake her duties for her.

"Oh, thanks! you're very kind, I'm sure," replied Mrs. Rose, who particularly liked walking with an amiable valet who lived not many doors away; "and I shall be only too glad to get a sniff of fresh air in the park sometimes when my lady's out dining."

Consequently the new housemaid soon found herself ensconced in her mistress's dressing-room during the afternoons, ready to attend to any visitors who might wish to wait in the boudoir for Mrs. Vivian Chasemore's return. But before she had had the opportunity to receive any one, she had taken care to provide herself, in case of need, with two bottles of the best sherry.

CHAPTER XII.

"SHE LEAVES ENGLAND THE DAY AFTER TO-MORROW."

VIVIAN CHASEMORE had spent Christmas in London that year, in hopes that, as time went on, his wife might become stronger and more fit for travel-

ling. But as the spring set in bleak and stormy, and her weak state of health continued, he decided to transport the whole family to Nice with as little delay as possible. He came to this resolution rather suddenly, and more on account of the infant than his mother. For the extreme cold did not seem to agree with the son and heir, and during the last few days he had become weaker and more languid than Mrs. Fleming liked to see him. She had even carried him to Regina's dressing-room with a request that Dr. Morton might be sent for to examine into his condition. Now, for obvious reasons, Regina had avoided this gentleman's presence as much as possible since her return to England. She was afraid of the scrutiny of his professional eye, not knowing how much or how little he might be able to guess of her secret by merely looking at her. She fancied that on the few occasions he had visited the nursery, he had glanced suspiciously at herself, and she dreaded his putting questions which she might be unable to answer. So that when Mrs. Fleming first suggested sending for the doctor, she tried to avoid the necessity for it, and said they had better wait a day or two and see if the child really required medical attendance or not.

"Wait a day or two!" echoed the nurse indignantly; "if you knew anything about babies, ma'am,

you would not talk like that. Why! an hour's too long to wait sometimes, with an infant of this age. Their lives are like the snuff of a candle—out before you can say Jack Robinson. The child's looking very weak, in my opinion, and shrivelled with this cold, and if you won't send for the doctor, ma'am, I must ask the master to do so."

"Why, you don't mean to say he's really ill!" exclaimed Regina, with a look of consternation that gained her more of Mrs. Fleming's favour than she had ever enjoyed before.

"For she did really seem as if she cared for the poor little thing at that moment," the nurse observed afterwards to her confidante Jane; "and it drew my heart out to her."

But the expression had only been caused by the sudden fear that the baby might die, and that if he did die, all her anxiety and suspense and sin would have been in vain.

"There is nothing *really* the matter with him, is there?" she repeated, as she gazed into the nurse's face.

"Well, ma'am, I don't want to frighten you! I won't go so far as to say the dear baby's downright ill, but he's ailing, and he don't get on as I should like to see him, and if I told you otherwise I shouldn't be doing my duty by the child."

"What is the matter?" demanded Vivian, who entered the room at that moment.

"Oh, Vivian, Vivian," cried Regina, overpowered by the combination of feelings that assailed her, "nurse thinks that the baby is ill, and we ought to send for Dr. Morton!"

The way in which she laid her weary head upon his shoulder and wept as she said the words, appeared to be just what a young and anxious mother would do under the circumstances.

Her husband kissed her to reassure her fears, but his face became almost as white as her own.

"Is this true?" he asked, turning to the nurse.

"Well, sir, the mistress is frightening herself beyond what is needful, but there's no doubt that the dear child does not thrive, and I should like to have Dr. Morton's opinion on him."

Vivian rang the bell furiously.

"Send Thomas at once to fetch Dr. Morton. Say that the baby is ill, and we must see him immediately," was his order, as the servant appeared to answer it. Then he went up to the infant and kissed its cheek softly. "Dear little fellow," he murmured. "He does look thin and pinched. What do you think is the reason of it, Fleming?"

"Well, sir, the dear child has never really thriven, so to speak. You see his mamma didn't

nurse him herself, and I think he ought to have had a wet-nurse from the beginning. And this cold is terribly against him, too. He'll look very different when the warm weather comes."

"We will take him to Nice, if the doctor recommends it," said Vivian, gravely. Then he turned to the sofa, across which his wife had thrown herself sobbing. "Regina, dearest, try to control your feelings. I am so afraid you will suffer for it. The dear baby's not really ill—only a little ailing, and Morton will soon set him right again."

"Oh no, he won't. He's going to die. I am sure of it, and it is all my fault, and you will never love me again," she ejaculated, almost beneath her breath.

"Don't talk of such a thing!" said Vivian, shuddering.

He had scarcely realised, till that moment, what the loss of this little infant would be to him.

"Now, ma'am, pray don't take on so, or you'll kill yourself as well as the child! And what will be the good of that?" interposed the nurse philosophically. But Regina would listen to neither of them, as she rocked herself backward and forward and thought what would become of her if the baby were to die, and all her trouble would be wasted.

The doctor's entrance put a stop to further dis-

cussion. He examined the pinched features of the infant, felt its feeble little pulse, put a few inquiries to the nurse as to its digestion, and pronounced its condition to be wholly due to its being reared by hand.

"You must get a good wet-nurse for it at once," he said cheerfully. "I will send you one in from the hospital this afternoon, and the little fellow will be all right in a week. Come, Mrs. Chasemore, you mustn't worry yourself about nothing; there is no need of these tears. The baby only wants a little alteration of diet to be as strong as ever."

"I was thinking of taking them both to Nice until the warm weather," said Vivian.

"The best thing you can do, my dear sir, provided you get a wet-nurse first. Give the child the breast and a warmer temperature, and we shall see him come back a perfect cherub! Good morning! I will send you a woman this afternoon," and with many bows the fashionable doctor took his departure.

"It's just as well to try it," thought Mrs. Fleming, as she carefully covered up her little charge and carried him upstairs; "but I don't like the look of the child's face, and I shan't be easy till it's gone *again*."

As soon as they were alone, Vivian approached

the couch and folded his wife in his arms. Her apparent solicitude for the baby's health had caused him to believe himself mistaken in her feelings.

"You feel more comforted now, darling, don't you?" he said. "Morton promises we shall have the wet-nurse this afternoon, and I will make every preparation for our starting to Nice next week. Shall you be ready to go by then?"

"Oh yes!" she answered languidly.

"It will do you good as well as the little one, for I have not liked your looks lately, Regina. Why are you so melancholy, my dear, and disinclined for the pursuits in which you used to take so much pleasure? You don't seem to care for dressing or dining out or anything now."

"I feel so weak," she said in a low voice.

"You must have refused at least a dozen invitations during the last month, and seem to care to see no one but that horrid Selina Farthingale! It makes me very unhappy, Regina."

She was silent.

"Is there nothing I can do, my wife, to bring back the smiles of which I used to be so proud? If anything could make me regret our baby's birth it would be to see how it has altered you. You are not the same girl I married. I do not know you in these tearful languid moods."

"I am so unhappy, Vivian!"

"But why, dear?"

"You will never love me again!" she said, as she hid her face from him in the sofa-cushion.

"Oh, Regina! I have never ceased to love you! But you never seemed to care about my love. You affected to despise any demonstration of affection until I checked my own wishes in order to make myself more agreeable to you. And then, during that last miserable interview we had before I went to Norway, you told me so bitter a truth it nearly broke my heart. How could you expect me, after that, to guess that you were unhappy for lack of love?"

"It was not the truth," she whispered; "at least it is not now. I wish sometimes that you had never had any money. It has been the curse of my life. I hate the very name of it."

"No, no, dear! don't go so far as that," said Vivian, cheerily. "Money is a good enough thing in its way, but if you have lived to love me the better of the two, why, let us thank God for it, that's all."

But though he took her in his arms again and kissed her warmly, Regina's heart was not satisfied. There was something forced, both in his manner and her own. She had blighted the fresh, warm

love he had given her with the coarse asseveration she had made—it would never be the same again: and between them lay the shadow of the awful lie which she had told him—the trick she had played upon his best and purest affections.

And until this obstacle were removed by a complete confession, she knew his love would never spring up for her again in its former luxuriance, for there can be no real love without the most entire confidence.

The wet-nurse arrived as Doctor Morton had promised, and the infant having submissively agreed to the change of plans, the fears of the household subsided, and no one except Mrs. Fleming anticipated any further difficulty. But she, with feminine consistency, was rather inclined to be offended at her system of diet being exchanged for any other, although she had been the first to propose it.

“It’s just as well the poor innocent has taken to her, as it’s the doctor’s wishes,” she grumbled to Jane, confidentially; “but as to every one crying out that he’s got a colour in his cheeks already, and is quite a different child, well, I can’t see it, that’s all! And he was wheezing terribly in his sleep last night, too! I couldn’t get a wink myself for hours, and feel quite wore out with it to-day.”

"This running off to Nice is a very sudden affair, and quite upsets everybody's plans," observed Jane.

"So it does! The mistress meant to stay at home this afternoon, but the master's hurried her off after something to do with the journey. She was up here just before she started, and left particular word that if anybody calls, Mrs. Rose is to say as she'll not be home till the evening. I suppose she expects that old faggot Mrs. Chasemore to turn up, and wants to get rid of her before the master and she comes back. But Mrs. Rose has gone out on particular business of her own."

"Oh, I will take her duties for her and see after Mrs. Chasemore," cried Jane with alacrity.

"Well, if you ain't as good-natured a girl as ever I met with," said Mrs. Fleming admiringly, as the housemaid left the room. Whether Jane employed the interval in praying that the General's widow might make her appearance that afternoon, it is impossible to say; but if she did so her prayers were answered, for about four o'clock an audible colloquy with Thomas in the hall was followed by his calling her name and informing her that Mrs. Gene Chasemore desired to wait in the mistress's boudoir until her return. It was not the first time by many that the old lady had called in Premier Street since

Jane had been located there; but on each other occasion Regina had been at home and entertained her visitor herself. Now, however, the opportunity she longed for had arrived, and she determined to make the most of it.

As she stood at the head of the stairs waiting to receive the lady, she watched her first lay hold of the handle of the dining-room, as though she were about to enter there.

"That's the dining-room, if you please, ma'am," observed Thomas, smiling.

"Oh yes, of course! I wish to wait for Mrs. Vivian in her boudoir."

Whereupon she grasped the handle of the drawing-room door, which came next in order.

"That's the drawing-room, if you please, ma'am," interposed the footman, with a broad grin.

"Of course! I know that! I'm going to the boudoir," responded Mrs. General Chasemore, and immediately fell to wrestling with the door of the library, which completed the suite of rooms on the ground-floor.

"That's the library, if you please, ma'am," again suggested Thomas, as he burst out laughing behind her back.

"I know that as well as you, man!" replied the lady testily, as she stumbled against the lower stairs.

"I have told you already that I am going up to Mrs. Vivian's boudoir."

"Here, Jane; come down and help the lady up to the boudoir," said the servant, insolently—(servants will be insolent when their superiors degrade themselves)—and the housemaid, delighted rather than disgusted at the mystified condition in which the general's widow appeared to be, ran smiling down the steps to offer her arm. But Mrs. Chasemore refused her support with the supreme haughtiness of a person who knows that she is not walking quite straight.

"I need no assistance of yours, young woman?" she said in a tone of offence; "I'm neither infirm nor ill. Go on in front and open the door of the boudoir for me."

The housemaid did as she was desired, stirring up the fire to a cheerful blaze, and wheeling an arm-chair in front of it for the accommodation of the visitor.

"Mrs. Vivian Chasemore will be *so* disappointed, if she comes home and finds you ~~have~~ gone, madam!" she observed, as she removed the widow's fur cape and muff, and placed two or three illustrated papers on the table beside her. "She was talking of your coming here all the morning. But Mr. Chasemore particularly wished her to choose some purchases

this afternoon, and quite dragged her out with him against her will, or I am sure she would have been here to welcome you."

"Who are you, young woman?" demanded Mrs. Chasemore. "I have never seen you here before, and you speak much above your station in life."

"Well, madam," said Jane, blushing, "I have received the benefit of a good education, and see no harm in profiting by it. But I am only here for a short time, in the place of my cousin, Ellen Withers, who has gone home for a holiday. Will you allow me to get you some tea, madam, or some coffee?"

"You seem to be a very superior sort of young woman, and I should think Mrs. Vivian would be sorry to lose you again. I don't care about tea or coffee, my dear, they don't agree with me; but if you could get me a glass of sherry, I shall be obliged to you. I have walked all the way from my house, and feel quite knocked up."

"You shall have it in a minute, madam," cried the obliging young woman, as she flew from the room.

In another moment she returned, bearing a couple of glasses and a black bottle of sherry.

"I am so sorry to be obliged to bring it to you in this rough manner, madam!" she said, with a

winning smile; "but the fact is, the butler is out, and he is so suspicious of us poor servants, that he won't leave the keys of the pantry behind him for a moment. But this is the very best sherry, madam; you need not be in the least afraid of it, for it was bought expressly for me when I was very ill, and the doctor chose it himself."

"Upon my word, young woman, you are very obliging!" said Mrs. General Chasemore, as Jane poured out a good bumper of the wine and handed it respectfully to her. "It is, as you say, most excellent sherry; but I mustn't deprive you further of your little private store."

"Oh, pray don't think of that, madam! It is of no use to me, I assure you—indeed, the doctor has forbidden my taking it any longer; and I shall be too much honoured if you will do me the favour of drinking it."

Mrs. General Chasemore seemed to think this was the most sensible sort of servant she had ever encountered; and as she lay back in her chair, and smacked her lips over the sherry, she considered whether it might not be possible to induce her to accept service with herself as soon as her term of duty with Mrs. Vivian was ended.

"Don't leave the room," she said graciously, as Jane made a feint of retiring. "I should like you

to stay and talk to me a little, if you have time. How soon do you expect to leave Mrs. Vivian's service?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, madam. It depends, I suppose, on my cousin's movements. She has gone to nurse her mother, who has met with an accident, and I must remain here till her return. But perhaps, now that there is a wet-nurse, they will be able to do without me."

"A wet-nurse! What! has the baby been ill?"

"Oh yes, madam; quite poorly. They were obliged to have the doctor to him, and the whole house was in an uproar. I felt it myself terribly; for so much of my work has laid in Mrs. Fleming's rooms that I have taken quite a fancy to the dear little fellow."

"But he's better, I suppose?"

"Yes, madam—much better, though Mrs. Fleming won't believe it. But his papa is very anxious about him still. I never saw a gentleman so wrapped up in a baby as he is in Master Vivian!"

The comical look which appeared in the corner of the old lady's eye at this assertion did not escape the notice of the housemaid, who perceived to her satisfaction that the wine was gaining an ascendancy over Mrs. Chasemore's brain, and would doubtless loosen her tongue before long.

"Is he now? But not more so than the baby's mamma, I suppose?" she observed slyly.

"Well, if I must speak, madam, I should say he is by a great deal. My mistress doesn't take much notice of the baby, to my mind. It seems to worry her more than otherwise. And that's strange; for, of the two, I'm sure it is more like her than like its papa."

"Of the two, yes! But not much like either, eh?"

"No, madam. If I thought you would forgive me, I should say that the baby didn't seem to me to have the same high-class look as his papa and mamma and yourself, madam. I have lived so much amongst the nobility, that I have learned to study appearances almost like a book."

"You're a very clever girl!" said Mrs. Chasemore; "but you can't judge babies by older people—babies alter every day."

"Yes, madam. But I wish his mamma took more notice of the dear little fellow. She's a long time getting about, too. She says her illness is all due to her confinement, but I think that must be her fancy," remarked Jane, with a searching glance at the widow.

"Yes, yes, of course! She is fantastical, like all the women of the present day," replied Mrs. Chase-

more, as she helped herself to a fourth glass of sherry. As it trickled down her throat she winked at the housemaid. "It's all fancy, my dear—all fancy! I was present during her trouble, and she made nothing of it—positively nothing!"

"So I've heard," said Jane, demurely.

"What have you heard?" asked the other quickly.

"Only, madam, that the mistress doesn't look, to the doctor and nurse, as if she'd gone through a bad time—in fact, they say they would never have known she had been confined at all, if she hadn't said so herself."

"Ah!" ejaculated the widow, wagging her head oracularly and rolling her eyes. "And what do *you* say, Jane?"

"I say the same, madam," was the quiet answer.

"But you won't betray her?" cried the creature, in her drunken folly. "You won't go and tell anybody what you've heard, will you, Jane? because it would ruin poor Mrs. Vivian, you know, and can do you no good! You are a respectable, well-educated young woman, Jane, and I'm sure you must know how to keep a secret, and would never go and tell people that the child isn't her own, just to make mischief, and be turned out of a good place, when you could

get a great deal more for holding your tongue about it."

"Let me give you a little more sherry, madam!" said the housemaid, as she poured out another glassful.

"It has shaken my nerves to hear you say you have found out all about it," remarked Mrs. General Chasemore, as she raised the glass with trembling hands to her lips; "because people will tell you, perhaps, that I had a hand in it, and I had not indeed! I happened to be staying in the place at the time, and Mrs. Vivian asked me to nurse her; and though I thought all the circumstances very strange, it was not my part to chatter about it, and so I held my peace; but it was very unkind of Regina to mix me up with the affair at all!"

"It is of no use denying it any longer, madam," said Jane, who had now heard all that was necessary for her purpose; "for, to tell you the truth, the whole town knows it, and whose child it is that was provided for the purpose of keeping the baronet out of his money in case of Mr. Vivian Chasemore's death."

Mrs. General Chasemore was by this time so intoxicated, that it never occurred to her muddled brain to inquire how the housemaid had gained that information of her employers' private affairs.

"Good Lord!" she moaned, in a puzzled and besotted manner. "How am I to get clear of it all?"

"What I should recommend you to do, madam, is to make a clean breast of it at once to Mr. Vivian Chasemore. He knows the whole story, but he does not suspect that you had any hand in deceiving him. If you go straight to him and say you have discovered the plot and think it your duty to inform him of it, you can explain your own part in it as you see best."

"But tell me," cried the widow, clutching at the housemaid's arm, "won't Regina have a word to say in the matter, and betray that I and Selina Farthingale made the purchase of the child between us?"

"If she does, you can but contradict her statement. You will be first in the field, and anything she may say in her own defence will be put down as invention. Let me entreat you, madam, for your own sake to lose no time in telling your stepson everything."

"But Regina will be so angry with me," whined the widow, "and so will Selina. They are both in the scrape, and I promised so faithfully not to tell."

"Then Mrs. Vivian will give her own version of the story first, and lay all the blame of it upon you. I assure you, madam, that her husband is only waiting till he has collected sufficient evidence to expose

the whole affair. And it is rather a serious business, remember! I am not sure whether you could not be transported for life if they can prove you to have had any hand in purchasing the child in order to commit a felony on Sir Arthur."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! what shall I do?" repeated Mrs. Chasemore, weeping hysterically. "I dare say I could make Vivian believe me, but then I should have to break off entirely with Regina. And I have not been half paid yet for all the trouble I took and the terrible risk I ran. I am sure if I have had fifty pounds from her, it's as much as ever I've received, and the Christmas bills come so heavy, and I've furnished my house new on the expectations she held out to me, and now to give it all up—it seems very hard."

"Oh! if that is what causes your hesitation, madam, I can very soon satisfy you on that score. Mrs. Vivian Chasemore has no intention of providing you with any more money."

"But she must—she owes it to me! I will tell her story in the streets if she dares to refuse."

"She would only say, madam, that you were mad, even if she heard of it. But she would not be likely to hear. She leaves England the day after to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIII.

"OH! VIVIAN, I DID IT FOR YOUR SAKE!"

"LEAVES England!" exclaimed the widow loudly, "and without a word to me! It is impossible!"

"Indeed, madam, it is quite possible! If you like to step into the dressing-room, I can show you the travelling trunks ready packed. They are going first to Nice for an indefinite period, and then to Italy and perhaps Spain. My own idea is that the mistress never intends to return to England again!"

"But why?" gasped Mrs. General Chasemore, "when they have a beautiful house like this and every comfort. Why?"

"Because, in my humble opinion, madam, she wishes to shake you off and have nothing more to say to you. She has incurred a heavy debt of gratitude to you, and she wants to shirk payment. She is trying to get the master to take her out of the country until the story shall have blown over, or where, if it should ever come out, she may be able to make good her own share in it without any interference on your part."

"But this is infamous!" cried the widow excitedly, "she has used me as a ladder to climb to her ambi-

tion, and now that she has attained it, she would kick me over."

"Just so, madam! your simile is a beautiful one, and states the case exactly. I have overheard her say as much when she was alone. The master has begun to inquire how she has spent her money lately, and to say he must look into her accounts; we servants hear a great deal of what goes on in a house, you know, madam, and I heard her answer that she had given a lot away in charity the last few months, but that she was determined to do so no more."

"In charity, indeed! the impudent minx? To dare to apply that term to her own husband's mother. And when *my* husband was a general too! and the one before that a colonel! I declare to you, Jane, that I have never received half my due for all the trouble and anxiety I took on her behalf, carrying that horrid child all the way to Normandy in my arms, and every one wanting to see what I had got in my bundle. I thought I should have thrown it overboard before we were half-way there."

"I can quite believe it, madam; but as you were doubtless careful enough not to let Kit Master guess your identity, there will be no difficulty clearing yourself from blame in the eyes of Mr. Vivian."

"Who is Kit Masters?" demanded the widow.

"He is the father of the baby, madam, and he has told everybody of the whole transaction. I believe that he will be here to-morrow to speak to the master himself about it."

"Oh, Lord, why did I ever have anything to do with it?" exclaimed Mrs. Chasemore, whilst her watery eyes seemed starting from her head with alarm.

"It will be quite easy to clear yourself from blame, madam, if you will only take my advice and tell Mr. Chasemore that you came here to-day for the express purpose of informing him that when you nursed his wife, you were unaware that the infant was not her own, and that now that you have discovered you were made a party to a fraud, you cannot rest till you undeceive him also. Hark! there is the carriage! I will go and fetch him up here, and you can tell your tale at once. Don't tremble so! Take another glass of sherry. It will steady your nerves."

"But if Vivian asks how I found it out, what am I to say?" demanded the wretched woman, as she tossed down another bumper.

"Say that *I* told you!" replied the housemaid firmly. "I know the mother of the child, and can make my own story good, and yours into the bargain."

She ran downstairs as she concluded, anxious only to bring the belligerents together before Mrs. General Chasemore's Dutch courage should evaporate.

She found the party in the drawing-room, Mr. and Mrs. Vivian Chasemore, and Miss Selina Farthingale, who had caught sight of them in Oxford Street and insisted upon entering the carriage, and they were just inquiring of the footman if any one had called during their absence.

Jane went up straight to her master's side.

"Yes, sir, some one has called and is waiting to see you on most particular business in my mistress's boudoir."

"To see *me*, Jane?" repeated Vivian with surprise. "Who is it—a lady?"

"Yes, sir! and please will you come directly, as she says her business will not wait."

"How mysterious!" quoth Vivian, laughing as he walked leisurely up the stairs.

Jane lingered behind one moment to accost her mistress.

"You'd better come too, madam," she said riously, "and bring Miss Farthingale with you, it's Mrs. General Chasemore, and she's nearly with drink."

The pallor of death seemed to overspread gina's beautiful features.

"What on earth can she have to say to Vivian?" she demanded of Selina Farthingale.

"I cannot tell you, madam," said Jane, answering the question; "but I wish you would be present at the interview, for she seems dead set against you, and declares she is determined to tell the master all your secrets."

"Selina, for Heaven's sake come and stop her tongue! The woman must have gone mad!" exclaimed Regina, as she followed Vivian up the stairs.

They all reached the boudoir together, just as he was about to open the door. Mrs. General Chase-more was seated in her chair with her arms lolling on the table, and her large eyes fixed upon the entrance. She was very much excited by the wine she had taken, but the shock of believing her fraud to be discovered, and herself in actual danger, had so far cleared her brain that she was quite capable of relating her story with coherence and determination.

"You here!" exclaimed Vivian, as his eye fell upon the figure of his stepmother. "I thought I had been sufficiently frank with you to prevent any further meeting between us!"

"Oh, Vivian! you have been very cruel and unjust to me, I know that; but you are your poor

father's own son, and I cannot stand by and see you deceived without raising my voice to tell you so."

"What folly is this?" he demanded angrily.

"Mrs. Chasemore," interposed Regina, with trembling lips, "had you not better come into the dressing-room with Selina and me? You and Vivian never get on well together, you know!"

"Don't go," whispered the housemaid, "she only wants to prevent your speaking, and to ruin you!"

"No, I won't go!" repeated the widow aloud. "I must speak—I won't be ruined! I never knew, Vivian, when I attended your wife in her illness, that the child was not her own. I thought, of course, that everything was right; but now that I am told—who am I to say told me?" she asked in a loud aside of Jane, who stood behind her. But before the girl could answer, Regina had sprung like a wild cat at Mrs. General Chasemore.

"You are mad!" she said. "You don't know what you are talking about—you've been drinking. Vivian, don't let her speak! Cannot you see that she is the worse for liquor? It's infamous—it's disgraceful! Why should creatures of this sort be allowed to enter the houses of decent people?"

"If this woman is here with the permission of any one, you know it is not with mine," said Vivian,

sternly; "but since she *is* here, Regina, I shall not refuse her the ordinary courtesy due to a visitor. Go on," he continued, turning to his stepmother, "and let me hear all you have to say."

"No, no, no!" screamed his wife, losing control of herself. "She shall not speak—I will kill her first!"

"Regina, for Heaven's sake command yourself!" interposed Selina. "You will betray everything by such conduct."

"Oh, of course they will try and stop my tongue, because they are both in the plot; but they shall not prevent my telling what I have heard. Vivian, that child is not your own!"

"*What!*" he cried vehemently.

"You needn't look like that. I mean that it's not yours, nor hers either. It's the child of a poor person that they've palmed upon you."

"Merciful God!" said Vivian, in a very low voice, as he leant against the wall for support.

"You wicked old woman!" screamed Selina. "It's every bit a lie, and you need not suppose that Mr. Chasemore will be such a fool as to believe you."

"A lie! Why you bought the child yourself in Drury Lane, and paid a hundred pounds for it!"

"I never did! I never saw the child, nor Regina

either, till six weeks after its birth, so *I* could have had no hand in it."

"Oh, you false hussy! If I hadn't proofs against you, do you think I should be here? But I've found out all your wickedness, and Regina's too, and that's why I cannot hold my tongue any longer!"

"I thought you were present at the birth of the child," said Vivian, in a voice still low with horror.

"So she was! she wrote and told you so herself. She is only saying this now because she wants to make a quarrel between us, Vivian," sobbed his wife. But he took no notice of her.

"It is a mistake," continued Mrs. Chasemore. "When I saw Regina at Pays-la-Reine, the infant was already there. She said it had been born during the night, and of course I believed her. She was so nervous about breaking the news to you, that I wrote that letter at her dictation, and if any one is answerable for the contents, it is herself."

"How you have deceived me all round!" groaned Vivian.

"But surely you are not going to believe what this woman tells you?" exclaimed Regina. "Ask her for her proofs, Vivian. Am I to be condemned in this horrible manner on the word of a drunken woman? Selina, tell him that it is false—that you know she was present at the time the child was born."

"I cannot say more than I have done," replied Selina, sullenly; "and I wish to goodness I had not been mixed up in the affair at all."

"I dare say you do, miss," observed the housemaid.

"Why, what have you to say in the matter?"

"Only that Mrs. General Chasemore gave me the whole history before your arrival, and, true or false, it is an awkward business to have one's name mentioned in connection with."

"It is none of yours, anyway, so you can hold your tongue."

"Mrs. Chasemore," said Vivian, "I cannot let the matter rest here. You say that the infant that I have been led to believe my own belongs to another person, and was bought for a sum of money. That it was my wife and Miss Farthingale who connived to palm this wicked fraud on me, and that you knew nothing of the truth until lately. How did you discover it?"

The widow was now at a nonplus, and Jane saw that she must come to the rescue, or she would be defeated. So, advancing to the table, she said in a firm, loud voice:

"It was I, Mr. Chasemore, who provided this lady with the requisite proofs."

"*You!* Why, you are the housemaid's cousin, are you not?"

"I entered your house in that capacity, in order that I might expose the hideous fraud that is going on here, with the attempt to rob Sir Arthur Chase-more of his future rights. I have the best proofs possible to lay before you. I know the mother of the child that is being nursed upstairs as your son and heir, and can produce her at any moment to recognise it, and tell you under what circumstances she was deprived of it. I know the father who sold it to Miss Farthingale—the woman who assisted at its birth—the marks by which they can determine its identity; and if you are not satisfied with what you have heard, I will bring forward an array of witnesses against which there can be no appeal."

"She knows everything!" cried Regina, as she hid her face from the angry eyes of her husband.

"And who may you be, who take such an interest in exposing this unhappy business?" demanded Vivian. The housemaid turned her eyes full upon Selina Farthingale. The moment of her final triumph had arrived.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed that young lady, recognising her for the first time; "it is Janet Oppenheim."

"No, Miss Farthingale, you are mistaken! I *was*

Janet Oppenheim. I *am* the wife of Sir Arthur Chasemore."

"My cousin's wife!" said Vivian; "and you have stooped to fill the place of a menial in our establishment?"

"I have stooped, Mr. Chasemore, in order to defend my husband's rights. You could hardly expect me to sit down quietly and see a false son and heir nurtured for the inheritance which lawfully belongs to those who may come after him."

Vivian Chasemore sunk into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"And I had learnt to love him so," he said bitterly.

At that moment, a knock was heard at the door, and Mrs. Fleming entered with a flurried air.

"Oh, if you please, ma'am, the baby's taken very ill with croup. I must have the doctor immediately. Will you please to order for him to be fetched at once?"

But no one answered her. Regina was lying face downwards on the sofa, and Vivian was sitting in an attitude of despair at the other end of the room.

"Oh, please, sir! what am I to do?" continued the nurse, appealing to her master.

"Let him die!" was the uncongenial answer.

"Not so!" said Lady Chasemore. "He has a

mother who loves and values him. Order Thomas to go at once for Dr. Morton, nurse, and do everything you can for the baby till he arrives."

"Yes, I will. But is there anything wrong here, Jane?" demanded Mrs. Fleming, as she looked round at the strangely assorted group in the boudoir.

"Yes, very wrong. They have received bad news. You will hear it all by-and-by. But now you must go and look after the child," said Janet, as she thrust her from the room.

Vivian rose and went and stood before his wife.

"Regina," he said, "tell me the truth! Is what we have heard a lie or not?"

"Oh, Vivian! Vivian! I did it for your sake."

"Silence," he answered sternly, "and don't add another falsehood to the horrible wrong you have done me. Did you buy that infant for a hundred pounds, and is the whole story of your having borne it at Pays-la-Reine a lie?"

"They persuaded me to do it!" she sobbed. "I should never have thought of it alone. But I imagined you were disappointed with me—and it seemed so hard that the money should go from us for want of a child to inherit—and so—and so—oh, Vivian! kill me, but do not look at me in that manner! I have never had one happy moment since I consented to deceive you."

He turned from her contemptuously.

"Lady Chasemore, I believe you told me you could produce the mother of this unfortunate child. How long will it take you to do so?"

"Not an hour, Mr. Chasemore! I will take a cab and bring her back with me at once!"

"Will you be good enough to do so, and let me know when she is here? Until then I have no wish to be disturbed. But the sooner this shameful business is completed, and my house cleansed from the stain of deceit that rests upon it, the better!"

So saying, he walked into his own dressing-room and locked the door behind him. The four women left in the boudoir looked at each other for the first time.

"Well, miss, and a nice part you've played in this little game," observed Selina spitefully, as she met the eyes of Janet Chasemore.

"What you think or do not think of my conduct, Miss Farthingale, is of no moment to me; but I shall be obliged if you will address me by my title in the future. It is not usual in society to call married women 'miss.'"

"I don't know who you may have been," sighed Regina, "but I think you have done a most cruel and unjust thing, Lady Chasemore. And until you really produce the proofs you spoke of, I for one

will not allow that child to be thrust from my house as an impostor."

"I don't think you will have the option of choice, Mrs. Vivian," returned Janet, "for its mother will not let it remain here for an hour after she has seen it. But I must leave you now to amuse yourselves as best you may till my return. I see the old lady is more than half asleep, so I can trust her with safety to the mercy of your tongues. I am quite aware that she lied all round; but self-preservation is the first instinct of nature, and inculpating herself would not have saved you. It has been an awkward business from beginning to end, Mrs. Vivian, and next time you attempt to carry out an intrigue I should advise you to be more careful in your choice of confederates. *Au revoir.*"

And, with a light-hearted nod, Lady Chasemore left them to their own reflections, and whispered dread of what penalty they might be called upon to pay, now that their crime had been discovered. As she emerged upon the landing she was caught hold of by Mrs. Fleming.

"Oh lor, Jane! where *is* the mistress? The dear baby's awful bad. He's just been took with a fit, and I don't know as he'll hold out till the doctor comes; and that wet-nurse is no manner of use at

all. The master and mistress ought to be told at once."

"Take my advice, nurse, and don't disturb them. They're in great trouble, and wish to be alone."

"But they'll never let their own flesh and blood die without ever coming to have a look at him, surely."

"Go back to the nursery, and don't leave it till I return. There is a great surprise in store for you, and you'll know it as soon as I come back again."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" cried the nurse, wringing her hands; "I do wish that there doctor would be quick and come."

Lady Chasemore left the house without further delay, and drove at once to Clarence Lodge. The Christmas holidays were not yet over, and Miss Netherwood was staying in the country, so she experienced no difficulty in procuring Belton to return with her. She did not tell the girl positively that she had found her little boy, for fear a disappointment should be in store for her, but she enlightened her sufficiently, on their way to Premier Street, to make Bonnie's cheek glow and her blue eyes beam with the excitement of expectation. As they entered the hall, with its exotic flowers and marble statues, at which the girl gazed with unmitigated admiration, Thomas approached Lady Chasemore.

"I am afraid it's a bad job upstairs, Jane," he whispered. "The doctor has never left the nursery since he entered it, and the house is turned upside down for hot water and flannels."

"Poor little fellow! I hope he'll get over it," replied Janet, as she thought compassionately of the simple, blue-eyed mother who followed wonderingly in her wake. On her way to the nursery she stopped and knocked at Vivian's dressing-room.

"Mr. Chasemore, I have brought the witness I promised you. Am I to take her straight up to the nursery or not?"

At her appeal he rose slowly and unlocked the door and stood on the threshold, gazing at Janet with sorrowful eyes that showed traces of recent emotion. But before he had time to answer her, Bonnie had recognised him.

"Oh!" she called out suddenly, "it's Mr. Alfred Waverley;" and then, without further prefix, she fell on her knees before him. "Oh, Mr. Waverley, I told her that you'd help me though I never thought to see you here! Oh, sir, try and find my baby I've suffered a deal since I married Kit Masters, and he stole the child from me; but if miss and you can get him back, I think I could forgive all that's gone before! Oh, Mr. Waverley, sir, I never thought see you!"

And then she lay trembling where she had cast herself, as the great fact of his actual presence rose up to try her courage. Vivian raised her from the floor and dragged her to the window, where the fading light of the January afternoon made recognition more practicable.

"Good God! is it really Bonnie? Why, my child, however did you find me out, and what have you to do in this house?"

"Miss Oppenheim brought me, sir," said Bonnie, half alarmed at her own presumption; "and I don't know what for, unless she has heard some news of my poor baby. Oh, miss, please don't keep me in suspense!" she continued, appealing to Janet. "Let me know if there is any hope for me."

"Yes, Belton, I have traced your child, though you will find him much altered from what he was when you parted with him. Mr. Chasemore, *this* is the mother of the infant upstairs!"

"*This!*" he repeated, wonderingly. "*Bonnie!* My God, was it not enough to wrong me as they have done, without making me the unconscious injurer of this poor innocent girl?"

Bonnie was looking vaguely from one to the other, unable to understand the import of Vivian's speech, when Dr. Morton came hastily down the nursery-stairs.

"Mr. Chasemore, I regret to tell you that the infant is very seriously ill. I think you had better come and see it. And would it not be as well to bring your wife with you? She might reproach us afterwards for not having let her know."

"All right, Morton! I will do what is necessary. Take her upstairs," he continued to Janet, pointing to where Bonnie, with dilated eyes, was listening to the doctor's statement.

"Is that my baby?" gasped the girl; "is he dying?"

"Oh! I hope not. Come with me, Belton, and let us see," said Janet, as they followed in the wake of the medical man.

Vivian had not meant to accompany them, but as Bonnie looked back beseechingly at him, some hope of sustaining her in the fresh trouble she had to undergo influenced him also to seek the nursery-floor. As they entered the room they saw the hapless little baby laid on a pillow upon Mrs. Fleming's lap, entirely prostrated by the convulsions it had passed through, and peacefully breathing out its last.

"Oh! Jane, my dear, I'm glad you've come, for it's a'most over with the poor lamb," cried Mrs. Fleming as she caught sight of Lady Chasemore. But the next moment she was startled by seeing

Bonnie spring forward and sink on her knees by the side of the dying infant.

"Oh! it *is*—it *is* my baby! See, miss, here is his little 'pig's ear' that I told you of, and his dear little face has scarcely altered a bit. Oh! my boy—my boy!"

"Who are you?" demanded the nurse, querulously. "Get away, and don't press so against the child. I can't have the poor dear disturbed in his last moments."

Bonnie's violet eyes sought those of Vivian, appealingly.

"Mr. Waverley!"

"Fleming," he said authoritatively, "give the infant to that young woman! *She is his mother!*"

"Sir!" exclaimed the nurse in astonishment.

"Do as I tell you! this is no moment for explanations. Morton, oblige me by saying nothing till it is all over."

Mrs. Fleming laid the pillow deferentially on the lap of Bonnie, who had seated herself upon the ground to receive it, and joined the group who stood around her in instinctive awe of the silent messenger who folded his wings amongst them, even then.

"My little boy," said Bonnie softly, in a strange voice that thrilled the bystanders; "my little boy,

will you know me again in Heaven? Oh! I never dreamt I should find you like this. I thought I should live all my weary life, darling, without seeing you again, and that you'd be a big strong man when I was an old woman, and it is very strange to think that you are going home before me! Oh! my little angel—stop! I have nothing but you in the wide world! Don't go and leave me all alone. Baby—baby! don't look so blue and pinched. Oh! sir," to the doctor, "do you think if I were to lay him next my bosom that he would grow warm again?"

"No, poor soul! don't do that. You will only make him die the sooner."

"Can nothing save him? Sir! he is my only one, and we have been parted so long. Is there nothing else that we can do? I know you must be clever. Cannot you save this little child for me?"

"Indeed, I cannot—or I would! It is God's will that he should leave us. You must try and be patient and submit."

"Oh! I *have* been patient. Indeed, Mr. Waverley, I have. I have had so many troubles since you left us, sir, and this seems the worst of all. Oh! baby darling, I am your mother! Open your eyes and look at me just once before you go."

And, as if in answer to her agonised appeal, the little child did open his eyes for a single instant, before the film of death passed over them, and he was gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I AM GLAD YOU LOVED HIM."

As soon as they found that they could make their escape without being noticed, Selina Farthingale and Mrs. General Chasemore had slipped downstairs and quitted the house. But Regina, left to herself, was anxious and irritable, and hearing an unusual bustle overhead, became curious to ascertain the cause, and pushed her way into the nursery.

"Why have you all assembled here?" she inquired. "What is the matter?"

"*That* is the matter," replied her husband sternly, as he pointed to the dead child upon Bonnie's lap; "there lies the infant who might have been alive and well at this moment had you not torn it from its mother's breast with your cursed hundred pounds!"

"*Dead!*" she exclaimed in a tone of horror.

Then Bonnie perceived that she was childless,

and sprung to her feet, clasping the little body to her bosom.

"Are *you* the woman that robbed me?" she cried fiercely to Regina. "Is it you who persuaded that cruel man to sell his own flesh and blood? Oh! Mr. Waverley," she continued pathetically to Vivian, "tell me *you* had no hand in this matter; *you* wouldn't have wronged me, after all the years that we have spent together?"

"Indeed, dear Bonnie, I would not! I never knew nor heard of this foul transaction till to-day. I have been wronged, poor child, almost as much as yourself, for I was taught to believe that poor little one belonged to me, and I loved it dearly—dearly!"

"I am glad you loved it," she answered in a low voice. "I am glad, since I was to lose my baby, that it came to you. I know you have been kind and good to it—as you was to me—but oh! Mr. Waverley, 'tis very hard to find it only to lose it again."

"We all know that, Belton," interposed Lady Chasemore, "and we feel for you in your disappointment; but even this is better than the uncertainty you laboured under before."

"Yes, miss, perhaps it is; but I can't find it in

my heart to forgive them as committed such a cruel robbery upon me!"

She resigned the little body into the hands of Mrs. Fleming as she spoke, and let her arms drop languidly by her side.

Dr. Morton had taken up his hat and left the house, since there was nothing more to detain him there; and the servants, guessing the true state of affairs from the conversation they had overheard, were very compassionate in their manner to Bonnie.

"Let me take him, dear!" whispered the nurse into her ear. "He's been tended like a prince all his lifetime, and he shall be laid out and buried like a prince—and that I'm sure the master will promise you."

"I never knew the child belonged to you!" said Regina, fixing her scared eyes upon the stranger.

"Perhaps not, ma'am; but you knew you were robbing some poor mother of her rights. And what did you do it for? What's the good of children unless they're our own? Just for the sake of dressing him up in ribbons and laces like a toy, you've broke my heart!" replied Bonnie, sobbing.

"I've nearly broken my own heart, too," she answered.

"Do you want to compare your grief to mine?" cried the bereaved mother. "Did you carry him in

your bosom for months, amid such trouble as you've never dreamed of, and thought nothin' of kicks nor cuffs, for the sake of the little one that was comin'; and then after you'd brought it into the world, and gone through that dreadful pain and sufferin', and was ready to forget it all for the joy of the baby, to have it stole away from your side and sold like a slave to strangers? Have you ever had a child yourself?" continued Bonnie, startling Regina with the unexpected question.

"No!" she faltered.

"I thought not. There's no mother's heart in your bosom, or you'd never have done such a wickedness. There's only one thing I'm thankful for—that he never lived long enough to call you by the name you've got no right to! It's better to think of him in his coffin than to live to see that!"

"Oh, Vivian! can you hear every one turn against me, and not give me one word of comfort?" cried the wretched Regina.

"Don't appeal to me!" he answered coldly. "My only doubt is whether I shall be justified in not prosecuting you openly for this fraud, lest I should be suspected of having had a hand in it. Don't speak to me or look at me! You have in-

flicted a more grievous wound upon my heart than you will ever have it in your power to heal."

"Oh, merciful God, have pity on me!" moaned the poor girl, as she cast herself upon the bed. "My punishment is greater than I can bear!"

"You have brought it on your own head, Regina. Your real motives in attempting to cheat me and the world, as you have done, are best known to yourself; but if they were, as you have hinted, to win back my affection, they have utterly failed. I will never live with you again after to-day!"

"Vivian, Vivian! have mercy on me!"

"What mercy have you shown to me or to this unfortunate mother? I can never think of you again but as of one whose hands are stained with the blood of that innocent babe! Pray to God for forgiveness, if you will. You have none to look for from me! Mrs. Fleming, you will see that everything necessary for the interment of the child is carried out with the same care as though he were what he has been supposed to be—my son. Poor little one!" continued Vivian, as he stooped to kiss the marble forehead of the dead infant; "I could not have loved you more had you been mine!"

Then he turned on his heel and left the room, without another word.

"He is gone!" cried Regina; "and he will never return again! Oh, Vivian! Oh, my husband! I love him so! I wish I had been dead before I attempted to deceive him!"

At these words, uttered in a tone of despair, the sweet, pitiful heart of Bonnie was stirred to compassion. She walked up to the bed, and stood sorrowfully by Regina's side.

"Poor lady! I don't think you meant to hurt me."

"Indeed, indeed, I didn't! How could I tell the child was yours? And they told me that the man seemed so ready to part with it! I thought it was doing him a kindness."

"I have seen your face before: once in Bond Street, when you spoke gently to me; and once when you were married to *him*. Don't cry so terribly! He will be sure to come back again."

"Oh no, he won't. This is the second time I have driven him from me, and I know it will be the last. But it will kill me! I cannot live without him!"

"You shall not. I will follow and send him back to you."

"*You!* How can *you* persuade Vivian against his will?"

"You call him by another name than what I

knew him as; but I am Bonnie, whom he knew so well and was so kind to for four years, and I am sure that he will let me speak to him."

She walked up to her dead baby and kissed it just where Vivian had left the impress of his lips.

"Good-bye!" she whispered, with sobbing breath; "good-bye! I am so glad *he* loved you! We shall meet him again, by-and-by, in heaven!"

Then she turned to leave the room.

"Belton, where are you going?" demanded Lady Chasemore.

"Back to Clarence Lodge, miss; but I have a little business to do first. No, don't come with me. I would rather be alone."

When she had reached the landing she retraced her steps, and again approached Regina's bed.

"I forgive you, poor lady!" she murmured, with trembling lips. "I am sure that you was kind to him, and I forgive you!"

Then they heard her faltering feet descend the staircase, and they were left alone with the dead child and their own thoughts.


* * * * *

Of course the news of the baby's death and the discovery involved in it reached the ears of Lady William Nettleship, in some miraculous man-

ner, almost as soon as they had occurred, and brought her to Premier Street the next morning, eager after a dish of scandal. The old woman resembled the eagle only in one particular—that where the carrion carcase lay, there would she gather with her particular friends to discuss it in all its bearings.

Regina, having been left alone by everybody (Lady Chasemore, even, having taken her departure to the arms of her lord and master), had passed a miserable night, full of fear and horrible conjecture, and was still lying languidly in her bed, when, to her dismay, her mother was ushered into her presence. Then she knew what she might expect, and felt all her sorrow change to desperation, like a wild animal driven to bay.

“Dear me, Regina,” exclaimed Lady William, looking like a bird of evil omen as she sat by the bedside shaking her paralytic head at her daughter. “I am shocked to hear from Thomas that the poor child’s really gone, though if what people are saying is true, it is just as well perhaps that it should be out of the way. What *is* this dreadful story I hear about his not being your child at all? I came over expressly to ask you. My housemaid met your cook last evening, and she was full of it. Of course it’s untrue, but it’s very unpleasant. How on earth



did it get about? Vivian must have it contradicted at once."

Regina trembled with agitation. She knew it would be useless to attempt to deceive Lady William on a point which sooner or later must be public property, and therefore she determined to brave it out and carry it off with a high hand.

"Vivian will not take any trouble in the matter," she replied, with affected carelessness, "and for the very good reason that the story is perfectly true. The child was not mine. I adopted it!"

"*Not yours!*" screamed her mother in a shrill falsetto. "Do you mean to tell me that the whole account of your being confined at that outlandish place in Normandy, and nearly dying except for the assistance of that horrid creature the dowager, was a myth? Why, if that is the case, you and she must be two of the most infamous liars in creation."

"Come, mamma! don't call names! I never stood your lectures very meekly in days gone by, you know, and late events have not improved my temper. Vivian has been the most to suffer in this business, and no one else has any right to find fault with me."

"But I won't admit that he is the greatest sufferer. You have made a fool of me and of all

the world. The idea of picking up a dirty brat out of the gutter and passing it off as your own! And I actually spent three pounds on a robe for the little animal. You ought to be ashamed of yourself to rob your mother in such a manner."

"Well, mamma, we will be quits on that matter. I will pay you back the three pounds, with compound interest, if you think it necessary."

"But what did you do it for? What possible object can you have had in attempting to palm a beggar's brat upon society as your own child. That is what puzzles me," said Lady William Nettleship.

Regina rose up in her bed like an avenging angel.

"*What did I do it for?*" she repeated witheringly; "how can you sit there and put such a question to me? Ask yourself, rather. Why did you rear me to consider wealth as the only thing worth striving for in this world, and poverty the greatest evil that can befall mankind? Why did you force me, by the example of your own life, to attribute every mean and dirty action to the effects of want of money, to believe that without it one must necessarily sink to the level of such women as Mrs. Runnymede and Mrs. Stingo, and that by its aid

alone one could afford to satisfy one's tastes and indulge in society consonant to one's feelings?"

"Oh! of course, abuse your poor mother because she doesn't happen to be quite so rich as yourself. That is like your usual gratitude, and when it is all through my means that you are established at all."

"Through your means—yes! I acknowledge your assistance so far, mother," said Regina bitterly. "Through your means I was sold like a horse or a heifer to bring misery and ruin into a good man's home and turn the heart that used to love me into a well of contempt."

"Do you mean to say you were not as eager to catch him as ever I could have been?" demanded Lady William. "Why, everybody knows you flung yourself at his head from the first day you saw him."

"I don't deny it! I was an apt pupil, and learnt the lessons you had taught me but too well."

"I never taught you to be a fool! Having got the man, why couldn't you be content with him?—instead of mixing in a low intrigue of this sort, which you must have known would be found out."

"Because you have never left off taunting me with the fact of my childlessness. We have never met but what you have planted some sting in my breast by your allusions to the uncertainty of my

prospects in the future, and my folly in marrying without proper settlements. You have worked me up to such a pitch sometimes, that I have felt almost frenzied to think that the day might come when I should find myself as impoverished as yourself and compelled to sink to the same level. Oh, mother! if you knew how I loathe the life you lead—with your cards and wine parties, and your rouge and false hair and demi-rep friends—you would believe me when I say that I would kill myself sooner than return to it.”

“My demi-rep friends indeed! You had better be a little more cautious in your choice of words, Regina, unless you wish to be indicted for libel. And pray what do you call such ladies as Mrs. General Chasemore?”

“Nothing better! But I was forced into her society, and when we shared this horrid secret, I could not drop it. If I had only taken my husband’s advice from the beginning, all this would never have been.”

“Oh! you are going on another tack now, I suppose, and about to become everything that is admirable in domestic life! Really, Regina, you should have joined your husband’s profession and gone on the stage. You would have made a most versatile actress!”

"Mamma, you shall not sneer at me. You may blame me as you like—you may call me all that is deceitful and cold-hearted and avaricious—you cannot say worse than I have deserved, but there is one spot in my heart that shall be sacred even from you, and that is the grief I experience at having only just discovered how much I love him."

"Hoity-toity!" said Lady William, scrambling to her feet as Regina's tears began to flow fast. "If you are going to treat me to any sentimentality, my dear, I will take my departure. You have not been so over-polite to me this morning that you can expect me to bear patiently with the lachrymose mood in which you evidently contemplate indulging. I told you you were a fool, just now, and so you are. Any woman who lets herself be found out is a fool. But I didn't give you credit for such an extreme of folly as this. You had better ring the bell for Mr. Chasemore. He is the proper person to dry your tears. I should only be accused of hypocrisy if I attempted to do so."

"He is not here. He has left me, and in all probability I shall never see him again," said Regina. "He has found out that it was my cursed ambition that led me to marry him, and he will not believe now that my false heart is capable of such a thing as love."

"How very romantic!" sneered Lady William. "But it really shocks me to hear you swear so. If these are the morals of Premier Street, I really think that the sooner I return to my 'demi-rep' friends the better. They, at all events, are not in the habit of using oaths to enforce their arguments."

"Oh, go! go!" cried Regina passionately. "Every word you say is a fresh aggravation to me. I will not answer for myself if you remain here longer."

And so Lady William shuffled out of her daughter's bed-room and went down to the lower floor, where she summoned the servants in turn, and having extracted all the details of the scandal from their lips, proceeded to make a tour of the houses of her most intimate friends to retail what she had heard to them.

And meanwhile her unhappy daughter lay on her pillow with her face downwards, wondering if she should ever see Vivian again, and if so, what words she could use in order to make him believe she loved him.

On the same day, and about the same hour, Mr. Farthingale, seated in his private office in the city, was handed the card of Sir Arthur Chasemore. Now his daughter Selina, for reasons of her own, had studiously avoided giving him any intimation of what had taken place in Premier Street the day be-

fore, preferring that the circumstances of the case should come to his knowledge their own way. He was, therefore, quite unprepared for seeing the baronet enter the office with a lady on his arm.

"God bless my soul, Miss Oppenheim! This is very unexpected indeed!" he said fussily, as he set chairs for his visitors.

"The lady has changed her name, Mr. Farthingale. Allow me to introduce you to Lady Chasemore."

The little lawyer stared in mute astonishment.

"Your wife, Sir Arthur?" he stammered at last.

"My wife, Mr. Farthingale, as fast as the law can make her. And therefore you will not be surprised that we have come here this morning on business. As Lady Chasemore's husband, I am entitled to ask you how soon you intend to settle up the affairs of her late aunt, Mrs. Mather."

"I really don't understand you, Sir Arthur; I believe there is a little something due to Miss Oppenheim—I mean Lady Chasemore—and when I have time to look into the matter, I will let you have an official statement; but——"

"You must be good enough to *make* time, Mr. Farthingale; and I fancy when you go regularly to work you will find that the 'little something' is more than you imagine. Here is a letter from Lady Chasemore's uncle in Bombay, in which he states

that his sister left various sums of money, chiefly in railway scrip, amounting in all to some sixteen or eighteen thousand pounds, and that the papers must necessarily be in the hands of her solicitor."

"This is most extraordinary," said Mr. Farthingale, growing very red. "Who is this Bombay uncle? I never heard of him before."

"Perhaps not, Mr. Farthingale," interposed the silvery tones of Lady Chasemore. "My aunt had quarrelled with him for many years, and never mentioned his name; but I knew it, and finding you were so very long in settling her affairs, I wrote and asked his advice as to what I had better do."

"Why did you not apply to me, Lady Chasemore? You know that ever since the death of your lamented aunt, I have only been too anxious to lend you every assistance in my power," said the lawyer, with much confusion.

"Oh! of course I know you were very good in procuring me an under-teacher's place at Clàrence Lodge, and promising, if possible, to save a little money for me out of the wreck of poor auntie's fortune; but I have been waiting for it three years, Mr. Farthingale, and so both I and Sir Arthur think it is about time we were provided with a statement on the matter."

"What scrip is in your possession belonging to

Lady Chasemore?" demanded the baronet sternly. "I have no intention of leaving this office until I know, Mr. Farthingale."

"Oh! really, Sir Arthur, I hope you won't be hard on me. I have had so much business of importance on my hands lately, that I have had time to think of nothing else. This scrip had to be sold out and collected, Sir Arthur, for I never imagined that Miss Oppen—I mean Lady Chasemore—would continue to trouble herself with shares; and being so comfortably situated as I believed with Miss Netherwood, I thought a little delay would be of minor consequence. However, if you wish it——"

"Call your clerk in at once, sir, and let us see Mrs. Mather's will."

The lawyer, trembling with agitation, was compelled to produce the document in question, which was spread out upon the table and carefully examined.

"Why, here is a matter of sixteen thousand pounds, producing an income of eight hundred per annum, invested in six companies, the scrip of which is in your possession. What have you to say for yourself, Mr. Farthingale, for having kept silence on this subject for three years?"

"Indeed, Sir Arthur, I had nothing but Miss Oppen—Lady Chasemore's—interests at heart in

delaying the selling out of these shares. The times have been very hard, and she would have lost a considerable sum of money on them."

"And her income?"

"Oh, the income is all right!" replied Mr. Farthingale, with a forced attempt at great merriment. "I felt myself in the position of this dear lady's father, you know, Sir Arthur, and exerted the parental privilege of laying by a nest-egg against her marriage—which I shall be most truly happy to make over into the hands of so worthy a recipient as Sir Arthur Chasemore."

"Very considerate of you, I am sure. You will be good enough, then, to pay the sum of two thousand four hundred pounds, with interest, into my bankers'—Messrs. Calvin and Co.—and to deliver over the scrip in your possession to my solicitor, Mr. Faithful, of Nathan Street, Holborn."

"Mr. Faithful your solicitor, Sir Arthur! Do I understand that you intend to take your monetary affairs out of my hands?"

"Take my affairs out of your hands, you scoundrel!" cried the baronet, in a fury. "I should thin I did! And you may consider yourself deuced lucky that I don't kick you out of your own office into the bargain."

"The law, Sir Arthur! the law!" remonstrated

the red-haired little lawyer, as he got behind a chair.

"D——n the law—you cheat! If you don't pay in that two thousand four hundred pounds with due interest to Calvin's this afternoon, and Faithful does not receive the scrip at the same time, you shall have more of the law than you will like; for I'll indict you for retaining my wife's money with intent to defraud her of it. So you may take your choice between prompt payment or a trial for swindling;" and so saying, Sir Arthur swung out of the office with Janet, smiling serenely, on his arm. She had only one regret connected with the interview—that Selina had not been present at it. Mr. Farthingale slunk home that evening in the most abject spirits.

"We are ruined, Selina," he said; "we are ruined. I've had to refund the whole of Janet Oppenheim's money with interest, and I haven't enough capital left to carry on my business with."

"More fool you to let the minx outwit you!" was the filial reply. "Sir Arthur's got a bargain! I wish him joy of it."

"So you know they are married!" said her father. "When did you hear of it?"

Thereupon she told him of the disclosures that had taken place in Premier Street the day before,

concealing, as was natural to so evil a nature, her own share in the transactions, but liberally abusing Mrs. General Chasemore and Regina for their mutual deceit and fraud.

"Mrs. Chasemore!" quoth Mr. Farthingale; "the general's widow. You don't mean to tell me that you've quarrelled with her, Selina?"

"Quarrelled with her! I should think I had. The vulgar, dissipated, foul-tongued old woman. I never mean to speak to her again. Why, she called me a hussy!"

"And I have promised to marry her!" groaned the little lawyer.

"*What?*" exclaimed his daughter. "Have you been spending your evenings with that horrid creature, and has she entrapped you into an engagement? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, at your age. But do not imagine that I shall remain here to be ruled over by such as she. You must give me a separate allowance, and I shall leave the house and live by myself."

"It is not in my power, Selina. I have not been quite candid with you with regard to my income, hoping that you might marry well, and become independent of me. But it is almost all gone, and you and Mrs. General Chasemore will have to make the best of what remains to us."

And the "best" was very bad indeed for the rest of their joint lives.

* * * * *

When Bonnie crept downstairs from the room in which the body of her dead infant lay, Vivian had already closed the hall-door, and gone forth into the bleak January evening by himself.

The girl's only instinct was to follow him, though with what purpose she scarcely knew. The hope of finding her child, which had barely had time to kindle before it was extinguished, had left a sore dull aching at her heart; but that feeling was nothing compared to her fear of the danger which seemed to threaten the man whom she knew only by the name of Alfred Waverley. She had been witness to his anger and remorse—she had heard his last passionate words to his wife—his avowed determination never to return home again; and a vague dread possessed her that he meant to throw himself into the river, as she had done in her great pain, and that at all hazards she must follow and bring him back. With that idea she passed through the hall again (never giving a thought now to the beautiful objects that had entranced her eyes on her entrance) and gazed from one end of the street to the other. There had been a fall of snow some days previously, succeeded by a hard frost that had

made the roads and pavements very slippery, and the sky was overcast by a uniform tinge of grey, rendered darker by the fast coming night. As Bonnie stood there, straining her sight to discover some glimpse of her friend, the cold winter blast lifted the shawl she wore, and blew her fair hair into her eyes. At last she caught sight of his figure crossing into Great Portland Street, and set off as fast as the slippery state of the pavements would permit her, in pursuit of him—up the Marylebone Road as far as Baker Street, where Vivian suddenly dived into the dryland Avernus that does duty for a station in that district. Panting and breathless, keeping her shawl as well as she could around her with one hand, whilst she held on her little black bonnet with the other, Bonnie pushed her way amidst the crowd after him. Once she was stopped in her career by the demand for a ticket, which she had entirely forgotten to take, and she had to run back with all speed to the booking-office, fearful lest Vivian should have left the platform before she gained it. When the clerk asked her for what station she required her ticket, she answered, "anywhere," in a tone which made him remark saucily that it wasn't the line for Hanwell. But when she explained to him that she only wished to speak to some one on the platform, he gave her a third-class for Portland Road, and let her go in

peace. She tore down the steps like a mad creature, and on first entering the station, thought she was too late. But it was only the pitchy darkness—the clouds of steam—the noise of arriving and departing trains, and the hoarse announcements of the porters, that had confused her. Vivian apparently had not yet made up his mind where to go, for presently her eyes discerned him in the further corner of the platform, gazing moodily at some advertisements, and in another moment she was at his side.

“Mr. Waverley!” she said, plucking his sleeve to attract his attention. “Mr. Waverley! Oh, pray speak to me!”

The gaze that met hers was full of astonishment.

“Bonnie, my poor child! what made you follow me here? What do you want of me?”

“Oh, Mr. Waverley, pray come home!”

“I have no home, child! Home is a place where there is love and confidence, and mutual respect. I have long ceased to look for them in my house, and I never mean to return to it.”

“Oh, don’t say that, sir! I was very bad once, when Kit took my poor baby from me, and I went and throwed myself right into the river; but the gentlemen at the hospital showed me how wrong I had been, and made me promise never to do it any

more. You won't do anything of that sort, will you, Mr. Waverley?"

"No, no, Bonnie! Men have a different method of drowning their grief. And so you suffered, poor girl, even to the point of desperation, and never let me know? How was that? Did you think I had ceased to be your friend because you had lost sight of me?"

"Oh no, sir! but poor grandmother (she died last year, Mr. Waverley) used allays to tell me that a grief that can't be cured must be endured. And who could have cured mine? Only I ought to have endured it more patiently. And then I knew you were married, sir——" with a little tremble in her voice—"and I thought you had forgot all about such poor folks as grandmother and me!"

"Indeed, Bonnie, you are mistaken, although I deserve the reproach! I have never forgotten you, nor the days I passed in those little rooms in Drury Lane; and I have often wished I was there again, for I have not been very happy since I left them. God forgive me for not having found you out sooner, and learned all that was happening to you! I might have prevented this foul business altogether had I done so."

"Don't speak of that again, Mr. Waverley, sir! Don't let it fret you. I know you feel for me, losing

my poor baby, but no one's so much to blame for it as Kit. It was his wickedness from beginning to end, and I don't think your lady meant to harm me, Mr. Waverley, nor yet yourself, when you come to look at it in that light."

"Didn't mean to harm *me*, Bonnie! Why, how could she have harmed me more than by trying to make me rear another person's child as my own? Making me waste my holiest affections, too," he continued, in a broken voice, "on an infant that had no claim to them."

"But oh, sir, she did it for the love of you. Can't you read a woman's mind better than that? She thought you despised her for being childless, and that your love was weaning from her. It was very, very wrong, sir, and foolish into the bargain, but she's lying on her bed now, weeping fit to break her heart, and it's only you that will be able to comfort her."

"She must look for comfort elsewhere! I can never forgive her!"

"Don't say that, Mr. Waverley. We've all got too many sins of our own to dare to say that of a fellow creature. Why, I wouldn't dare to say it myself, even of Kit. I never want to see his face again, but I do hope the Lord will forgive him, as I do,

for he'll have a miserable enough heart to grow old upon, even with that."

"You are too good for me, Bonnie, and a thousand times too good for Kit! But tell me now (since you have mentioned him) is there nothing that I can do to bring you together again?"

"Oh no, sir, thank you. I think I must have been living on the hope of finding my baby, for now that that's over, I feel as if my life was over too, and there was nothing left to live for. Only if you would grant me a favour, Mr. Waverley!"

"I will do anything for you in my power, Bonnie."

"Go home to your lady, sir. I know she loves you truly, though she may not have shown it. Her sobs went to my very heart. I would rather be myself, as I stand at this moment, than she—poor thing—for she's poorer than I am if she's lost your love."

"And what am I to say to her if I *do* go, Bonnie?"

The girl's voice sunk to a solemn whisper.

"Tell her, sir, that you forgive her, free and open, for what she's done, if so be 'twas done for the love of you. And teach her, sir, to pray for God's forgiveness before yours, and who knows but what He may send a blessing on you still, and a child of your own to inherit all your riches?"

"Ah, Bonnie, you set me too hard a task."

"I don't think so, sir. I think it's what your own heart is longing to do, if your pride would only let it. I am sure you must love her—such a beautiful lady and so sad, and who may be the mother of your children yet—and you will never be happy yourself until there is peace between you."

"I don't expect any happiness in this world."

"Oh! Mr. Waverley, there may be plenty for you—I pray God from the bottom of my heart there may—if you will only set about the right way to get it. But perhaps your poor lady has never had a good mother to teach her what is right and what is wrong, or where to go for help and comfort when she needs it."

Vivian thought of Lady William Nettleship, and shuddered.

"I am afraid she hasn't, Bonnie."

"They used to call me 'daft,' Mr. Waverley, and I do think I have never been quite so ready as some folks, but since I throwed myself into the river and went to the hospital, things seem to have become a bit clearer to me than they used to be, and I can see how difficult it must be for people to throw off the teachings of their childhood. You've felt that yourself, haven't you, sir?"

"Yes, Bonnie, I have."

"Then promise me you'll be a teacher to your lady. Mothers' lessons are very hard to unlearn, but when a woman loves truly, her husband can make her do it if he has a mind to. Oh, sir, do promise me!"

"To go back to poor Regina?"

"Yes, and never to leave her again. Oh! you don't know the hard thoughts that creep up in a woman's heart when her husband is unkind to her. It seems as if everything was lost. And you will go back this night or early to-morrow, won't you, sir, and forgive everything (as you hope the blessed Lord will forgive you at the last), and take her in your arms and tell her that is her home for evermore?"

"I will, Bonnie. But tell me, why do you take such an interest in my domestic life?"

The girl had been talking fast and with much excitement until now, but as Vivian put this question, all her courage seemed suddenly to evaporate.

"I don't know," she broke down, sobbing; "I can't tell, I'm sure; only I know'd you so well, sir, and you were allays very kind to me, and my own life seems to be well-nigh over."

She was wiping the tears from her eyes with a corner of her shawl, when the railway-bell and a

fresh rush of people on the platform showed that another train was close at hand.

As the crowd circled around them Bonnie made a last effort to bind Vivian to his word.

"*Promise me!*" she said earnestly, as she grasped him by the arm—"by the living God, *promise me!*"

"I promise!" he replied as earnestly.

But at that juncture, just as the ponderous engine with its eyes of fire came rolling through the tunnel with a shrill whistle, a couple of rough men rushed between and parted them. Vivian was standing at the edge of the platform with his back to the train, and the sudden impetus, joined to the slippery condition of the soles of his boots, threw him off his balance, and in another moment he would have fallen on the lines. The danger was imminent, but occurred so instantaneously that no eyes saw it but those that were watching him so hungrily. With the cry of a mother who sees her child in the jaws of death, Bonnie sprang forward, and catching Vivian, in the very act of falling, by some part of his dress, swung him with a force born of desperation behind her, and fell prone upon the lines herself. A universal scream of terror from the bystanders, and a series of shouts from the guards, rose to mark the accident; but the engine, with its

long train of carriages, rolled slowly but surely on, until they occupied the length of the station.

Vivian, who had been thrown on the platform himself by the determination with which he had been rescued, did not know what had happened, until they dragged the mutilated body of the poor girl, who had given her life for his, from beneath the wheels of the railway carriages. Then, horror-struck so as to prevent speech, he viewed the misshapen mass that had been so fair and straight but a few seconds before, and felt all his manhood shaken at the exclamations that went on around him.

Women were shrieking and fainting at the horrible sight: men were running here and there in search of a doctor or a stretcher: and the officials, with deep commiseration in their faces and heartfelt pity in their tones, were doing all they could by means of stimulants to see if there was any life left in that poor crushed and bleeding body.

And Vivian knelt there, gazing in speechless dismay at the white face that the cruel wheels had spared, and thinking of every innocent way in which the girl had shown her affection for him, from the first day he met her until now.

"She is quite gone!" said the guard.

"And little else to be expected," remarked a

porter, "when the poor thing's crushed to a jelly! How ever did it happen?"

"Can't say, I'm sure. Got too near to the edge, I suppose. They *will* do it!"

"Hush!" said Vivian; "hush! she is opening her eyes."

The misty, dreamy purple orbs, which had done more than their fair share in gaining poor Bonnie the sobriquets of "daft" and "wandering," unclosed themselves slowly and wonderingly, as though she marvelled to find she was still in this world.

"How do you feel, poor dear?" cried a sympathetic lady, who stood by weeping.

"*Promise!*" she uttered with difficulty, as she fixed her eyes on Vivian.

"*I promise!*" he replied, solemnly as before.

"Couldn't she take a little drop of something now, porter, if you were to raise her head?" inquired the sympathetic lady, tendering a pocket-flask.

"Better not move her, mum, till the doctor's come," was the porter's reply.

Once more the violet eyes opened, as though the effort to raise the lids were almost beyond nature, whilst the faintest smile flickered about the leaden-coloured lips.

"I—am—glad—you—loved him!" she gasped;

and, with a sudden jerk, threw her head back and died.

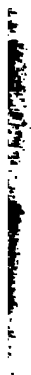
"It's hover!" said the guard.

* * * * *

No, Guard! not over!—nor ever will be over whilst time lasts. For Bonnie's death brought life into that desolate home in Premier Street, and united two hearts that might have drifted apart for ever.



THE END.







JUL 22 1941

